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## REALISM



# REALISM

A STUDY IN ART AND THOUGHT

BY

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## P R E F A C E

AN explanation, if not an apology, is perhaps due to the reader for offering him a book which discusses philosophy as well as art. My only excuse is that the field invites trespassers. So little has been done, at least in English, to discover the theory of realism in art, and its connexion—if it has any—with realism in thinking, that sooner or later some one was bound to raise the question whether the two things have not something more in common than their name. That is the origin of the book, though the chapters on art and those on philosophy can be read independently of each other. Chapters II.-VII. deal with art, Chapters VIII. and IX. with philosophy, while the first and last chapters may be called ‘mixed.’ The introductory chapter sketches some of the points which are discussed later, and some of the stages which have led up to the modern point of view.

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If there are obvious examples of realistic art which seem to be passed over, it is because the instances in the book have not been chosen with any thought of completeness, but only as illustrating the view suggested there. I have drawn almost always from my own observation, though any one will see how much I also owe to the work of others. In the philosophical passages it has been hard to take a connected survey. Modern philosophic realism is still in the making, and as a distinguished exponent has said to me, 'No two of us agree.' This being so, it is inevitable that some theories should appear to be emphasised at the expense of others, but the attempt to give a general idea of them seemed to be worth making.

*January, 1918.*

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# REALISM

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTORY

Realistic Controversies — Realism and Reality — The Sense of Existence—Medieval Realism—Rabelais and the Renaissance—Idealism and Scepticism—‘ Natural Realism ’ —The Romantic Spirit—Realistic Art in the Nineteenth Century—Revival of Realism in Thought.

**R**EALISM is a word which has had several incarnations and been the source of many confusions, but through all its history it seems to have kept one constant feature ; whenever it has been a centre of debate it has roused not only interest but passion. Few topics seem so remote from us as the disputes of the medieval schoolmen, few certainly so arid, yet they divided European thought for centuries, and set every university aflame with a fervour only rivalled by that of the sects and the circus-factions of the Eastern Empire. When the term was next dragged from a long slumber in the nineteenth century, to be applied this time to art, it soon

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became a battle-cry. Even now, when the kind of art it stands for has long established itself and is entirely familiar, it has not quite lost the power of provocation. The revival of realism in modern philosophy has not failed to excite a sort of indignant surprise, as at the disinterment of something which had been long supposed to be decently buried. But the furies of earlier controversy, both in thought and art, are so far spent that there is now the possibility of calm discussion.

The reason for the former heat is perhaps a simple one, which would account for the zest both of the realists and their opponents. It is that nothing touches people so nearly as reality, and there is nothing about which opinions are more confidently bandied than about the nature of what is real.

It would be an easy account of the matter if we could say that the realists all down the ages were the party of reality, but we should be met by the difficulty that the meaning of realism has almost been reversed in its progress from the medieval to the modern world. And even realism is a less ambiguous word than reality. It is touching to

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see how the latter is passed round as a counter in discussion, considering the uncertainty as to the sense in which it may be taken. For many the real is the same thing as the true. For others it is identical with the perfect. Others confine reality to what exists or happens in the surrounding physical world. There are also more esoteric meanings, and we know what it is to be pulled up in conversation by the remark, 'Oh, but so-and-so is more real *to me*.' To call the realists the partisans of reality, therefore, does not take us far ; the point is to discover what reality means for them.

At the bottom of realism, in all its variations, seems to be the sense of actual existence ; an acute awareness of it, and a vision of things under that form. It is a thoroughly natural feeling, and is, in fact, the primitive attitude of man. This is the instinct which strikes to the surface in those lively, primitive morsels of art—realism, as it were, before the fact—which we make out on the cave-walls of France and Spain. The ponies and bison there were drawn by some one who shared their existence more candidly than any civilised artist could do ; and he makes no slavish copy,

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but simplifies and presents the spirit of vitality within them. When we reach the more sophisticated world of Homer the difference from the primitive outlook is still one of degree rather than of kind. It is a world of clear outlines and tangible objects, where men expatiate freely in simple activities for their own sake, with no misgiving that it may not be worth while. It is the epic of life in space and time, and the gods become concrete, too, and are drawn within the circle. The realist plants his feet firmly there. There may be other possibilities, but they all radiate from existence. For life has, as Amiel said, the incomparable advantage of being there to start with. It presents itself independently of our ideas about it, and with it our action and reflection must square. For the early realism which is not a theory or a method, but a perfectly instinctive way of thinking and feeling, this world is not a point of departure ; it is a solid structure where man makes his home. No doubt this complacency does not last. The balanced serenity of the Greeks has been much exaggerated, and so has the uniformity of their speculations ; yet it remains true on the whole that they did not

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turn their backs upon the world, or raise a barrier between thought and feeling and action. Plato has been called the father of all realists because he seemed to give a real existence to the universal forms of things, in a world apart and of their own. That was the direction in which medieval realists were to follow him. Modern research, however, is showing us that a great deal of what has generally passed as Platonism should be probably attributed to Socrates ; and in the light of the latest forms of realism it is arresting to be told that Plato's mature philosophy ' found reality, whether intelligible or sensible, in the combination of matter and form, and not in either separately.' <sup>1</sup>

The turn of thought which produced in the Middle Ages the first thing we specifically call ' realism,' was only an aberration of the sense of existence. Medieval human nature, emaciated as it may seem sometimes, never lost this sense of physical reality. On the contrary, the medieval men exaggerated it all the more in their ideas because they were walled off from the full enjoyment of it in their lives. They gave reality to abstractions because they could not satisfy them-

<sup>1</sup> Burnet, *Greek Philosophy, Thales to Plato*, p. 332.

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selves with actualities. While the realistic spirit comes shyly to light in Gothic sculpture, it hardens frankly into materialism in the sacramental system of the Church and the scholastic type of thinking. A paradoxical feeling about reality runs through the medieval thinkers. The realists are passionately attached to the substantial nature of their world ; philosophy is said to adore ' things ' and spend its days among them, and the ghost of Boethius is invoked against any one who pares away their edges. But the things with which medieval thinkers busied themselves were not always, or mostly, of the same nature as the physical world. The material existence of this world was not doubted ; what interested the disputants were the ' universals ' which meet us at every turn among particulars and facts. They were the realities, whatever these might prove to be, represented by general terms like ' humanity ' or ' whiteness.' Had these any existence except what we chose to give them in our thoughts ? Were they simply ideas, abstractions, perhaps even mere names, which we could make and unmake as we chose ? Or did they stand for elements which were valid

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whether we thought of them or not, built into the very foundations of our world, or perhaps abiding in a world of their own, and somehow causing ours ? The realists were for one form or another of the second alternative ; being bent on establishing a reality which should be independent of us—not the creature of our language or our thought. It was not necessarily a physical reality. But it was their habit to think of things in terms of substance, and where we see characteristics and processes and relations, they tended to find beings and existences, graded though these might be to an immaterial fineness.

Medieval thought, for all its exactitude, is as profuse and wayward as Gothic ornament ; and Duns Scotus, the Subtle Doctor, crowded the interval between primal matter and ourselves with swarms of entitics—fictions, for the most part, of a brain which thought in terms of existence, and gave its creations a being similar to its own. A realism as luxuriant as this is exposed to inconsistencies. As the thinker elaborates his fabric, his impression of the existing world grows fainter. The actual living individuals cease to have importance for him.

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And he is not really compensated by his own discoveries. The Subtle Doctor went on converting abstractions into substances, but the beings which peopled his house of thought were only pale shadows after all. They had turned into a world of ideas which a zealous idealist might envy. Medieval realism is, in fact, the forerunner of great dogmatisms like Spinoza's, and great idealisms like Hegel's.

This is a lesson in the inadequacy of labels, and our first light on the equivocations of this particular term. We took the sense of existence to be the core of realism, and we shall find this confirmed by the way in which realism has evolved in art and thought. Looking back, however, on the medieval discussions, we cannot help feeling sometimes that the best realist of them all is the man who devastated realistic thinking, the great 'nominalist' doctor, William of Ockham. His way with the abstract realists was all too short, but he had much ground to clear. He reiterated with a deadly simplicity that you must not multiply entities beyond your needs, and his criticism told. But it would not have carried the weight it did if Ockham had not



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had more than a divination of scientific method and especially of psychology. This positive strain in him concentrated attention again on the physical world from which realism started, and which, like every philosophy, it had to explain. Scholasticism had been so wrapped up in 'universals' as to assign them an existence apart. When realism revived as a modern doctrine it would come back to individual things, to particulars; or at least to particulars and universals combined. Meanwhile the reaction from scholastic realism was the breath of a new spirit, for it meant a fuller return to the world of life, to all that was to be enjoyed and all that was to be known.

The great medieval argument, which occupied more than five centuries, was certainly not wanting in curiosity and strength of mind. It only wanted light and air. It needed, in fact, what everything medieval needed—a reconciliation with life. The reconciliation naturally showed itself more quickly and decidedly in art, for art is nearer to life than thinking is. There was already a poignant realism in Gothic art, a true and vivid representation of the actual, while

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thought was stumbling among chimeras. In art the Renaissance met the medieval spirit with no air of violent rupture, but in a gradual, continuous process, as the sculpture of France and Flanders and Northern Italy shows. But for the complete fusion of the old and new out of which a quickened sense of reality was to spring, one must look a little further on ; and if it is a question of finding a typical figure there is no better one than Rabelais.

When the feeling for life and the enjoyment of it come together again, as they do triumphantly in Rabelais, they are seen to have grown all the stronger for their separation. A huge capacity for satisfaction, a torrent of expression so profuse that one would say it was life itself, not art, were it not for the forms it visibly creates there—these were the riches of the old released by contact with the new. The whole ecclesiastical conception of a vitiated creation and corrupted hearts suddenly falls away. Once more there was freedom from misgiving, and everything was good, as it had been on the sixth day. The tree of knowledge was a delight to the eyes, and it was to be desired to make one wise. For, as Rabelais

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says in his preface, the things he treats of are not so frivolous as they sound. A quenchless thirst for knowledge is part of his desire for life, from which indeed it springs ; and he is splendidly confident that it will lead to good, not evil, if we set about it in the natural way, following the motto of Thelema, ' Fais ce que voudras,' and feeding our souls with what they want and need. Still, as Rabelais does not really separate art and knowledge, seeing everything in the concrete, and as part of the living activity of man, he remains above all the master of life and experience. There is nothing alive that he disdains or distrusts, nothing in whose vitality he would not eagerly share. ' By his impartial representation of life, which no narrowness of doctrine, no scruple of taste, no bias of art prevent him from fixing in all its myriad and unequal aspects, he is and he abides the source of all realism, broader in himself alone than all the currents which diverged after him.' <sup>1</sup>

This high estimate, which is M. Lanson's, perhaps may be modified a little. What we find in Rabelais is not so much the birth as the

<sup>1</sup> Lanson, *Histoire de la Littérature française*, 11th ed., p. 261.

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rebirth of realism, for the realistic spirit, instinctive and unformed, is as old as man. But so many strains united in Rabelais, with an impulse so distinctly modern, that he does almost deserve the title of a father. He had the vivid sense of life which we take to be the secret spring of realism ; his system, so far as he had one, was a frank acceptance of the constitutional traits in human nature and physical nature—the outlook of common sense ; his art was human nature over again, in a puissant, monstrous form ; and his curiosity was the new curiosity of science, nipping romantic enthusiasm with a cool return to fact. What he created was an atmosphere for realism. The shape of his art was not realistic, but he discovered a region where artists of that kind could follow him. His thought was not on the level of philosophy, yet he seemed to invite a philosophy to represent him. He hated metaphysics, like Samuel Butler, and performed a similarly ironic kind of office.

For a long time after the Renaissance and the Reformation it did not seem as if those events had been propitious to realistic thinking, though they led to superb cases of realism in art. Mental and

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social causes must be put together to explain this, and the mental change counts most. Protestantism and humanism, so contradictory in other ways, agreed in this; they united to emphasise the individual self and soul. For art that meant a new strong impulse to expression, to a creative activity which might still lend itself to religious or social forms, but was really pursued for its own sake. Self-expression in life or art or thought became more and more the purpose of man. The human spirit took knowledge of itself; Leonardo defined the subject of painting as 'man and the intention of his soul.' But this impulse would scarcely have passed into the desire of beauty or realised itself in art if great social changes had not been at work—breaking up the old medieval order, magnifying princes, placing riches at their disposal to amass the treasures of art and antiquity. Modern Europe took shape with a great magnificence in externals, and art was naturally more and more preoccupied with man and his surroundings in the actual world, invested now with a new sanction. This art soon developed a realistic side. The decided emergence of portraiture is

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a sign of it, and the growth of the tendency can be followed from Holbein's acute perception of physiognomy to Velasquez's realisation of the soul. Genre pieces and landscapes are another sign. In Dutch painting art turned for the first time to interpret the whole setting and intimate details of everyday life. This meant a value and independence for the actual which it had never possessed in earlier art.

While man's spirit found expression in art by going out to merge itself in the surrounding world, in philosophy it did the opposite and turned inwards on itself. And this was only to be expected. The new liberation had brought an enthralling gift to humanity—the discovery of self-consciousness. It was not only man's privilege to think, but to know that he was thinking. There had been philosophers and saints before, from Plato or Augustine onwards, who were curious about the conscious spirit, but hitherto no one had finally distinguished it from its environment, or taken it as the starting-point for an inquiry into what existed and what was to be known. Now voices were to be heard on all sides declaring the primacy of thought. Descartes

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with his 'I think, therefore I am,' began the first of many attempts to explain reality in terms of mind. Man is but a reed, yet he is a thinking reed, said Pascal. The rationalist philosophers were eager seekers after certainty, even when they began with doubt. But they could not escape from the spell which had been laid on them. The doors of consciousness were thrown open, and as they went from room to room of the great mansion, fascinated by its contents and deep vistas, they were shut off from perception of the world outside. Descartes lost the door-key, and it was not picked up for a century. Forgetting that thought is always thought *of* something, they easily identified it with abstractions or psychical processes, and the physical world passed out of view.

The builders of these great systems were also men of science, according to the spirit of their age ; and we may wonder why science did not qualify their idealism with a keener sense of physical reality. The reason seems to have been that the mathematical sciences were then, and for a long time, ahead of the physical sciences ; and their influence, instead of attracting thought

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to the concrete and the individual, made it more and more abstract. It was seen, not for the first time or the last, that a thinker with a mathematical bias may very well go to the extreme of idealism or of scepticism. Modern philosophy began with idealism, and then, as the sceptical spirit spread on every side in religion, society, and politics, the sceptical conclusions latent in speculative thought were drawn out to the exclusion of the others. The theory of ideas turned into a theory of impressions or sensations. It might seem possible to represent this as a return to fact—sensationalism will never lack a specious air of science—and certainly it meant that the hollowness of the idealistic fabric was discovered. But the reduction of everything to sensations ultimately left a world of which neither science nor philosophy could make anything, though Hume could still dine in it quite comfortably. The time was ripe for a realistic answer—a more persuasive one than the hearty kick on a big stone by which Johnson thought he had refuted Berkeley.

Johnson's appeal was to common sense, which he embodied so massively. Reid, the champion of natural realism, also appealed to common



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sense, sometimes unprofessionally enough ; but he was a better philosopher than he was often willing to be supposed to be. While the sceptical Hume had been chiefly interested in working out the logical consequences of previous theories, Reid brought men back to the world of habitual experience. He translated the instinctive realism of common sense into philosophic terms. This meant an appeal to various first principles or natural faculties which the reader might or might not be able to discover in his own breast. But Reid also argued sturdily for the reality of the physical world. He held, like plain people in general, that we did perceive objects, of which our sensations were the natural signs ; and in perceiving things we inevitably believed in their existence. By this ' judgment of existence ' he directly brought to light that sense of existence which is the presupposition of realism. So in his hands realism has definitely become a defence of the existence of the natural world, and of certain traits in our constitution which put us into true connection with it.

Without being too fanciful we can find in the art of the eighteenth century a good deal that

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was in the same key as Reid's robust speculations. Sentiment and sceptical reasoning did not monopolise the age : the main current, after all, was one of common sense and shrewd simplicity. It inspires the architecture of the time, even where a formal elegance disguises it. Fielding's hearty grip of human nature, Addison's eye for all agreeable variations that keep within the normal, declare the same feeling ; and so does Hogarth, whose business, Charles Lamb said, was to prevent disgust at common life, *tædium quotidianarum formarum*. In France this phase of the broadest, most general representation had passed with Molière ; but *Gil Blas* brought into literature a lively appreciation of externals, and Chardin's exquisite touch made familiar things beautiful in painting. With the keen relish of life that Venetians have always had, and a new charm and humour, Longhi shows us the masked ladies going to see the hippopotamus, and a scene in the dentist's surgery. Even in Rousseau, amid the rush of feelings that were going to sweep art and thought into entirely different channels, there is plenty of realistic by-play, and there is a sense in which the *Confessions*, highly romanced as they

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are, seem one of the most realistic books ever written. But that was not the fundamental impulse. Rousseau and the Revolution sound the knell, for a long time, of realism in art ; men were going to revel in their feelings, and adventurously transform the world, before they would be content with observation. In thought there was a similar reversal of accepted standards. Reid's solutions were not received as adequate, and the task of finding 'something deeper and truer' than had satisfied the Scottish philosopher was taken up by Germany.

The tide of romanticism flowed strongly for nearly half a century. It was mighty because it was not merely a tendency in art, but was fed by the events which had transformed men's lives. While Scott and Coleridge and Byron were winning fame among us, the French had been making romance in deeds rather than in words. The Revolution, imaginatively regarded, was the supreme melodrama of politics, and Napoleonism was the climax of the romance of war. Only when these upheavals had subsided did the romantic movement in French literature, as a whole, begin ; and at the same time there

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were symptoms of a revival of realism. The change in the prevailing type of ambition seems to account for this. The young men of 1820 and onwards could no longer scamper over Europe with conquering armies ; so, while those who were artists by instinct confided their hopes and dreams and disillusiones to their verse or prose, the ambitious, egoistic spirits plunged into the intrigue of politics or the many forms of social competition. These had become conventional again, they were no longer brilliant or exotic ; but they had an altogether new intensity, because the traditional barriers had been thrown down and money was undisguisedly the nerve of power. Society was being quickly commercialised ; the modern economic struggle had begun. Balzac takes up the story at this point and depicts ' the art of getting on ' in wonderfully grandiose dimensions, with high romantic lights, but also with a perfectly realistic setting ; Stendhal, while still abounding in romantic incident, is remorselessly cool in his dissection of character and motive. The new direction of ambition would naturally lead all forms of art back to a representation of actual conditions. The young

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artist, Gavarni, who was to be one of the most typical exponents of satirical realism, if not the most distinguished, was musing in Paris about the future one afternoon of 1828—it was still some time before romanticism reached its high-water mark—and he came to the conclusion that ‘*Il reste à être vrai.*’

But more than a fashion or the fixing of a social type was needed to displace a tendency that had become so deeply embedded as romanticism. The single influence which no doubt did most to accomplish this, as the middle of the nineteenth century drew on, was science, then declaring itself the spirit of the age and annexing confidently the domains of biology and history. The scientific temper implies a shifting of attention from the individual self to all that lies outside it and beyond. In coming under this influence art runs the danger of sinking under a deadening weight of fact ; but at the same time it learns from science a new reverence and patience for the material it handles. The subjective, lyrical inspiration loses prestige. The objective—all that can be known, seen, experienced by you or another as well as by me—gains it in exchange.

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The habit grows of looking at things for their own sake and in themselves. A landscape, a social situation, a moral predicament are scrutinised more closely for what they may contain, instead of being veiled in a mist of feeling, or treated as the mere occasion of a special mood.

In this atmosphere realistic art revived, and in reviving it became self-conscious and gave itself a name. It is said to have been on September 21st, 1850, to be exact, that 'realism' was first used to describe a form of art by the French novelist Champfleury. The painters and black-and-white artists—Courbet, Daumier, Monnier—were at first the most resolute in pressing on the new tendency. It took shape, defined itself, began to overpower the flagging forces of romanticism ; but as a 'movement' it had no fortune under the name of realism. A periodical published in 1856 with that title—*Réalisme*—only lasted for six numbers. Among the leaders, Courbet is barely remembered, and Champfleury has been entirely forgotten. And yet the tide had turned ; when *Madame Bovary* appeared in 1857 the victory was seen to be with realism.

Flaubert's masterpiece was a fresh and signal

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example of the realistic form in representative art, which we have seen appearing and disappearing since the days of the cave-men. It was quickened by the sense of scientific truth, but it was not subservient to it, any more than the best work in the realistic form of this or of any day. Realism as a *movement*, a type of art produced to order, and therefore ceasing to be art and becoming mere polemic or propaganda, was absorbed by 'naturalism,' and found in Zola its noisy and untiring exponent. The labels are at this point specially perplexing, as French writers have used the words realism and naturalism almost indifferently, while we, who have only hesitatingly taken naturalism into our æsthetic vocabulary, are in the habit of using realism as a term of abuse when what we mean is Zolaesque naturalism. There is essentially a difference between the work of Zola and the work of Flaubert or Tolstoy or Gorki, and it will be the object of a later chapter to define the contrast. To say, in anticipation, that realism is a genuinely artistic form, while the aims and interests of naturalism lie outside art, may seem to be begging the question ; but that is where the essence of the distinction lies.

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Both types aim at representing what exists ; but naturalism insists that this should be cut to a certain pattern, while realism is, or should be, prepared for all its possible manifestations.

A vivid reflection of the world we know and live in, from every side that our intuition or experience can grasp, has been and is increasingly the characteristic of modern art, so far as it deals with representation. The range of matter for representation has widened ; the depth of what it is possible to represent has been increased. It is not too much to say that there are always two tendencies at work in realism—the one extensive, always claiming as material some fresh aspect of the physical or social world ; the other intensive, penetrating further and further into the recesses of the soul. Supposing those influences mentioned before—the vision of the economic struggle for existence, and science, with its cold, dry light—had been unmixed, they might have led art to reflect unflinchingly the play of material causes and effects, but it would have probably remained prosaic, hard, and dull. We are fairly well aware how great is our debt to the Russians for pouring



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a fresh current into literature and life, and illuminating the honest English interest in life and morals, and the logical exactness of the French, with a new emotional candour—the candour of a people who have not grown shy of their feelings and are bent on an inner veracity which we seldom care to seek. From these and other causes which it would be endless to particularise, we have become prompt and eager to express our sense of all that experience encloses. Henry James puts it in a single phrase: ‘a change has come over our general receptive sensibility, an appetite for a closer notation, a sharper specification of the signs of life, of consciousness, of the human scene and the human subject in general than the three or four generations before us had been at all moved to insist on.’ Indeed this enlivened sense of the actual has overflowed the boundaries of anything that can be strictly called realism, and is felt even in those types of art or thinking which seem to diverge furthest from the existent and the concrete. Only perhaps in painting is there a marked recoil from this central core of experience—obviously a revenge on the triviality and

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insignificance which passed as realism for more than a generation.

In speculative thought there is certainly an endeavour to grasp experience more closely. If the reign of idealism in philosophy has lasted longer than the reign of romanticism in art, it is partly because the idealists have shown themselves more adaptable. They no longer lay stress on any mental apparatus of ideas, but on the system or unity or perfection which thought discovers in the universe. If they do not agree with realism, they believe in what may be called realisation. But the wave of reaction against all that is subjective and untrue to a common experience has not stopped short with this partial conversion of idealism ; it has led to a distinct revival of realism, in many quarters and under several forms. This revival springs from the feeling that though idealism has shifted its ground its prepossessions remain essentially what they used to be ; both its premisses and conclusions are dubious, and it is in danger of blurring real distinctions and real values in the finite world. Other recent philosophies, like pragmatism and Bergsonism, have been born of the same desire

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for 'more life and fuller,' the same discontent with a way of thinking which appears to idolise system and refuse reality to anything that comes short of the absolute Whole.

Modern realism in thought does not offer the short cut to immediate satisfaction which these theories promise. To some minds it will seem to be going backward rather than forward when it maintains that the world we live in does not depend for existence on mind or knowledge ; that the finite parts may claim reality as well as the infinite Whole ; and that no single adjective will sum up the universe we know. The forms of realism are diverse, and having started in a common reaction, they are most in agreement on negative and critical points. It must be left to later chapters to show whether realistic thinking can be defended successfully against the imputation which has also been brought against realistic art—that of being merely the superficial transcript of a very limited reality. It may be assumed, at any rate, that realism represents a distinct type of human interest in things, which contrasts with idealistic thinking and romantic art. Even the firmest disbeliever in æsthetic

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classifications or philosophic theories will probably admit the difference ; and he may even agree that it is as deeply rooted in nature as the division between little Liberals and little Conservatives which, we have been told, begins in the cradle.

## CHAPTER II

### THE FORM OF REALISTIC ART

The formal Theory of Art—Realism a Way of Representation—Faguet's Definition—Realism and Emotion—Realism not *Trompe-l'œil*—Flaubert and Guyau—Representation and Realism in the Different Arts.

THE place of realism in æsthetic theory is as dubious at the moment as once it seemed secure. The æstheticians, who will barely grant a foothold to the element of representation in art, are naturally still more merciless to realism. If we say, with Fenollosa, that the essence of art is harmonious spacing, or with Mr. Clive Bell, that it is significant form, then representation and realism must be merged in design to a point where they cease to have anything that can be called distinctive value. This view of the formalists, suggestive because it enforces an artistic lesson always needed in England, has been pressed perhaps too far. It is derived frankly from the consideration of visual art, and

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almost as evidently, we may think, from a pre-occupation with non-representational branches of it, like pottery and textiles, which are purely an affair of pattern. It has the freshness that is born of a direct insight into the way art handles some material. And it has the advantage of logical simplicity, of being genuinely true to the aim of æsthetics in trying to reach some universal conclusion—the point which distinguishes æsthetic theory from artistic criticism. But just because it is grounded on a sympathy with one art, or with that art in one particular phase, it may lead us to apply to all the arts without restriction a conclusion which is not really true of them.

Pater often warns us, and with his exquisite eye for distinctive quality, preaches by example, that each art has its own special responsibilities to its material, and its own untranslatable order of impressions. The essay about Giorgione, where he emphasised this most strongly, happens also to be the one where he committed himself to one of his few generalisations, namely, that all art aspires towards the condition of music, since in music alone is matter perfectly reconciled with form. We do thus instinctively feel music to be

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the limiting case, though æsthetics will never be firmly or completely founded until the comparative silence of musicians is broken, and some composer who is also a theorist distinguishes for us the form, matter, and subject of his art, and makes us realise the psychology of musical creation. Till then the great majority of us can only say that there *seems* to be this reconciliation in music between matter and pure form. But this conclusion, which Pater expresses, is not quite the same as that of the formalists. It does not mean the cancelling of matter or subject by form. It is one thing to say that representation or subject only gets artistic value *through* design, and another to say that it gets it only *as* design. In the former case the subject retains some rights, in the second it has none at all. There are arts that represent nothing, and others that represent little, and others that represent much ; and according to the special handling which is given to it in one of these latter, the subject or representation becomes matter of art. The painted landscape is still recognisable as a landscape, and we look at it to find some subtle aspect which the painter saw ; only it is no longer *mere* matter,

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but something transmuted, a piece of magical persuasion ; not, as Mr. Clive Bell would have it, just a bit of necessary information about space, or a clue for the artistically dull.

To those who uphold the theory of pure form we might gently address that warning of Leonardo's: ' You will be despising a subtle invention which with philosophical and ingenious speculation takes as its theme all the various kinds of forms, airs, and scenes, plants, animals, grasses, and flowers which are surrounded by light and shade.'<sup>1</sup> Why should you reject the whole wide field of representation because you are afraid of being betrayed into anecdote ? For to do so means giving up the immense ' pull ' which painting has in this respect over poetry, as Leonardo again has pointed out, because it works directly with visual images. Except where poetry is deliberately narrative or descriptive, and very often even there, it is saturated with the mood of the writer and charged with associations in every word. Appealing through words to the intelligence, it is liable and likely to wander down every path of reflection or fancy, while

<sup>1</sup> *Leonardo da Vinci's Note Books*, McCurdy, p. 159.



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painting moves all the more steadily for being limited by a sensuous medium. It is not copying that is in question, but the power of keeping one's eye—the eye of the body, and the 'mind's eye'—on the object. We remember Wordsworth's ecstatic delight at the discovery of the small celandine, and how he proposed to celebrate it.

‘ Little flower !—I'll make a stir  
Like a great astronomer.’

He wrote his two poems, which are famed as charming. But while they 'use' the celandine remorselessly as food for Wordsworth's own fancies and emotions, and attribute to it in turn every kind of human motive, there is barely a suggestion, here and there, of what the flower looks like ; and our feeling at the end is that Wordsworth contemplated himself first and the celandine afterwards.

Swinburne writes better of the sundew, and modern poetry, from Browning to Mr. Masfield and Mr. Gibson, has gone far in grappling with the problem of representation ; but the drama and the novel remain the forms which, in this field, most seriously compete with painting. We

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shall have to consider them as the kind of literary art which naturally represents things, and therefore seems to give the widest scope for realism. Realism is just one way of representing things ; let us try to see more precisely what it is. We cannot do better than follow for a little the account of it which Emile Faguet offers in his book on Balzac. Realistic art, he says, ' consists in seeing men and things exactly and dispassionately and painting them in that way. Its method will be, then, not to throw the whole of reality pell-mell into a work of art, for that is naturally impossible, and if that were realism, realistic art would consist in walking up and down the street, but to choose without passion, without inclination for anything but the truth, the most significant of the thousand details of reality and arrange them in such a way as to produce in us the same impression which the real itself produces, only more strongly.' <sup>1</sup> Simple though it sounds, this is, as Faguet says, extremely difficult. To him the difficulty presents itself thus. The artist who writes (Faguet's view is centred upon literature) only does so as men do everything,

<sup>1</sup> Faguet, *Balzac*, p. 137.

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because he is moved by ' passion ' or desire. He has always at the back of his mind the secret yearning to work upon the reader, to attract him, persuade him, and pour into his work something of his own thoughts and emotions. But that is just what he must not do, because directly he allows his own emotions and aspirations to be seen, he becomes suspected of having ' arranged ' the reality to suit them. The illusion of the real is lost. In fact the realistic artist is not only a paradox but an impossibility, because he can only write when moved by an emotion, while if he feels an emotion in writing he cannot be a realist.

The force of this demonstration is rather impaired by the fact that, in spite of it, realistic art exists. Putting aside all the quantity of the bald and the bad, which is outside or only just inside the pale of art, there remains a great deal of work in many shades of realism, many degrees of excellence, which is undoubtedly artistic and has to be accounted for. How did it come into being ? The conclusion seems to be that in the course of his suggestive definition Faguet has placed himself in an unnecessary dilemma. We have no difficulty in agreeing with him that the

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realistic artist must be free from distorting or irrelevant emotions, but it is less easy to see why he should be aloof from an emotion of any kind. The flaw in Faguet's account lies in the supposition that *all* emotions must be distorting. Writing here on a literary subject, and with a strong predilection, always, for the literary or philosophic point of view, he has fixed his attention almost entirely on just those moods or prepossessions which do interfere with a direct vision of the scene. Any art is liable to be distracted by irrelevant emotion ; and there is the possibility that literature and drama, saturated throughout with human reference, and responsive, consciously or not, to every current that thrills from contact with the time, may become interested, propagandist, or simply coloured by ' subjective ' moods. The stir of life's business is close and incessant ; and we are in danger of forgetting there are such things as emotions of a purely artistic kind.

What this artistic emotion may be for the realist is suggested in a phrase of Faguet's own, the ' *goût du vrai*.' Only the preference must be raised to the power of an emotion. It then

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becomes a compelling impulse which moves the artist to a statement of reality—a reality which physically exists. We come back, in fact, to that fascinated interest in the surrounding scene, in nature and the human actors, which sometimes working by attraction, sometimes by repulsion, but always with riveted and searching eyes, has been already mentioned as essential to the spirit of realism. This is not a distorting emotion because it is felt frankly for the things themselves ; they, or rather the artistic transcript of them, are what the artist is going to give us. He will not abuse them, like the man with a system, nor transform them, like the romantic and the idealist ; he takes them as they are, which for his purpose means as they seem—including in that all the psychological depths he can fathom.

Perhaps, however, the difficulty about feeling may seem to have been driven out only to come in again by the back-door. ‘Once you admit,’ it may be objected, ‘that emotion is not only possible but necessary for the artist, you have restored the personal, subjective view of things which in realism you are anxious to keep out.

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Feeling is a highly individual affair, and though you say the artist may have a pure emotion for his subject, the fact must remain that this is *his* feeling, tinged with his special colour. Therefore the view of things which he gives will be *his* view of things ; and indeed unless it is, unless it adds in this way something new to our common experience, it will have very little value or interest as art. Other artists than the realist may ignore this dilemma, but he cannot.' This criticism, which raises, of course, the whole issue of personality in art, and for realism has a particularly withering air, I mention not to discuss it at the moment, but to show that it is not forgotten. There is a case of an artist laborious and refining beyond most others, who yet cultivated impersonality with the fervour of a great passion and the persistence of a method. The case is that of Flaubert ; and perhaps a separate consideration of it will throw more light on this question of the personal and the impersonal, and the way they would appear in realistic art.

Leaving on one side, then, for the present the matter of individual colouring, let us come back to the chief features of Faguet's definition. It

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has, at all events, the merit of laying the only possible basis for discussion. It distinguishes between art and life, and avoids the temptation of supposing that what realism does is simply to give us life over again. Even a photograph cannot do that, for it does not give size or modelling ; and when it has called on the resources of colour and movement, it still continues to give us one thing which we would much rather it withheld—the insignificant. Stendhal approached the photographic view of realism when in a brilliant but rather misleading metaphor he compared the novel to a mirror moving along a high-road. Faguet is wiser, and sees that the artist must deal with the real by means of choice and arrangement ; and that he employs these precisely for the object which lies beyond the reach of photography—to concentrate our attention on what signifies.

But what, in this connection, *is* the significant ? Faguet has his answer ready ; it is ‘ the same impression which the real itself produces, only stronger ’ It is to be in some way more compelling, more communicative than the real. The idea may recur, then, that if this is the aim of

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realism it would be best attained by means of literal imitation or *trompe-l'œil*. For what could be a more compelling use of paint than to render, as in the Greek story, grapes or curtains so lifelike that you took them for the real ; or, as in the pleasant Japanese legends, a dragon so vivacious that it flew off the canvas, and mice so vital that they gnawed the rope which bound the lion ? The objection to these prodigies is that they recall us to the region from which art proposes to set us free. Their wonders are really fetters in disguise. The only purpose which *trompe-l'œil* can serve is either to get off a practical joke on the spectator—like the tin shrubs in an eighteenth-century garden which spout unsuspected jets of water—or to recall him to the sphere of use and practical enjoyment. True art plans our escape from these interested feelings. *Trompe-l'œil* is life in the wrong place, and can scarcely be called art. It is the custom to call it realism, and it does represent a realistic misconception or extreme ; it is the Nemesis which waits for a realism that has forgotten the conditions of art. The difference between them might be described by saying that *trompe-l'œil*



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aims at the most lifelike impression, and true realistic art at the most living one.

This stronger impression, which somehow makes life more living, or rather remakes it in art with greater vividness, is not easy to analyse, varying as it must with the artist's particular type of vision. In all cases its effect must be to make us see more keenly. In some, as with Holbein and the greater Dutchmen, art guides our rather groping vision and fixes it with an intense distinctness on the mass and contour of objects which the painter has so much more clearly seen ; which stand out for us, then, with an individuality that, for want of attention and 'eye,' we seldom discover in the real. Jane Austen and Flaubert have exercised a power analogous to this in literature. Sometimes, while the figures still keep an outward precision, they are shown to us not with their stationary value in repose, but, as Degas shows them, with the meaning suddenly conferred on them by movement—shown, in fact, as incarnate motion displayed against a background of immobile things. And sometimes, as with Velasquez, and still more with the great masters of the

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psychological method in literature, what is revealed is no longer the external contour, nor the animation of moving life, but the psychical depths within ; being rather than behaviour, the will at its source, the colouring of temperament, and the fluctuations of mood. All these are so many variations of the realistic method, which agree in producing the 'impression plus forte' that Faguet postulates ; but to catch and fix in words the inwardness of that impression, and sum up what it is that they all do for us, has hardly become more easy. Can we, indeed, ever describe the effect of art in language other than metaphor, which at the best can only be called happy ? Still, we remember that realistic art is attached in some special way to living existence ; that it suddenly opens our eyes to this, or enables us to see further into it. And this being so, we might apply to it a memorable sentence of the Goncourts about art as a whole, and say that realism at its successful moments is ' the eternisation, in a supreme, absolute, and definitive form, of the fugitiveness of a human creature or thing.' The shifting or substantial elements of existence are arrested and perpetuated for us, so that we see,

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as though for the first time, what 'existing' really is.

Realism thus seen presents itself, as it tended to do in Faguet's account, mainly as a process or an effect ; in the light of what it does for us rather than of what sets it moving in the artist's mind. A phrase of Flaubert's, where he is analysing one side of his curiously dual mind, gives a glimpse of the inner spring. There is something, he says—one of the 'two people' within him—which 'scoops and digs into truth as deep as he can, likes to define the small fact as insistently as the big, and would have you feel almost *materially* the things he describes.' This is certainly the 'taste for truth' become a passion, as was suggested ; and it is not hard to see that whether the artist nourishes it on science or not, it penetrates into art with a relentlessness very like that of the scientific spirit. Still, even in these decided words of Flaubert, it is tempered and justified by a strain that we can really call æsthetic—a *feeling* for the things themselves and a desire to make us feel them ; a closeness to the concrete reality which would make scientific 'truth,' by contrast, seem cold and irrelevant.

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The probing spirit allies itself to sympathetic intuition. This latter aspect of realism stands out more clearly in some words of Guyau, who, while emphasising, like Flaubert, the need of going deep, of stripping off all the veils formed by habitual and practical associations, regards the whole business frankly as a poetic adventure. 'It is a question of actually finding the poetry in things which sometimes seem to us the least poetical, simply because the æsthetic emotion has been worn out by habit . . . the problem is to give freshness to faded sensations, to find novelty in what is old as everyday life.' Guyau in all this passage has his eye rather on the realistic *subject* ; and in his pursuit of the poetic he is carried, as regards treatment, close to idealisation, 'rejecting tiresome and repulsive associations.' Flaubert, at least in precept, went the other way ; one remembers the passage in his letters where he says that nothing is to be gained by pruning or sweetening things. But if we take his declaration and Guyau's at the point where they touch, they suggest the balance of true realism ; and they remind us that so far from being easy, it is a moment exceedingly

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difficult to maintain. Harden Flaubert's attitude a little more, and you are in the domain of science; soften Guyau's, and you have a graceful idealism.

If we now put together what we have gleaned from Faguet, Flaubert, and Guyau, we shall have gathered perhaps as much as can be got without a consideration of examples and individual kinds of treatment. The question was how the realist would behave towards the real ; how, as we say, he would represent it. Faguet insists on the absence of all disturbing motives except a feeling for what is true, and Flaubert encourages us to believe this may become a passion. Flaubert and Guyau unite in emphasising the emotional quality and effect of the performance. Faguet seemed to admit this when he said that realism should give us a ' stronger impression ' than the real ; it was only as a means of doing so that his ' taste for the truth ' seemed rather pallid. He laid stress on choice—this kind of art would not be a mere reproduction ; and the other two writers suggest a mental activity which, at the least, creates afresh for us the objects they are thinking of. They all assume the fact of *treatment*. The negative condition of this treatment, that is to say, the

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absence of personal colouring on the part of the artist, really shows as essential and was emphasised by Faguet ; I assume it, and only postpone examining it more fully till we can see it, in Flaubert's hands, erected into a method.

It remains to be seen, as a matter of practice, how much the realistic form of art may do. So far the assumption has been that we can make statements about realism which will hold good of its appearances in all the representative arts, and this there is no ground for doubting ; but it does not mean that we may expect to find it manifested through them all in the same force and quantity. We were reminded by Pater of the peculiar and incommunicable way in which each art disposes of its medium and appeals to our imagination ; a reminder which is borne out by the obvious fact that the arts differ in their capacity for representing things. In this respect realism will follow on the heels of representation. The extent to which an art can represent things will be a measure of its realistic capacity. An art which is not particularly representative very soon reaches the point where it has absorbed, so to speak, all the realism it can take ; after which any further

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attempts at this kind of representation will be felt as obtrusive and inartistic.

In music, for instance, which among representative arts is the one which least reproduces things material or measurable, the limit in representing actual sound is reached at once, and the reproduction of the pealing of a bell or a cry of pain will be felt, as a rule, to stick out of the design, not to be resolved into it, almost like an actual gem *appliqué* on a picture. It is music in its purity that I am thinking of ; not opera, which as a highly mixed art lends itself to all kinds of concessions. When Schopenhauer said that music presented the metaphysical of everything physical in the world, he was not much exaggerating one's conviction that it deals with emotional sequences which language as yet cannot analyse, though they speak directly from the heart of things to our own emotions. As a direct representation of the things we can see, measure, or completely understand, there seems to be no true scope for realism in music ; though we may have to admit paradoxically that there might be a realism of such feelings as defy analysis.

The sculptor's problem is entirely different.

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His medium is material to excess, a physical reality so insistent that his first object, while keeping the quality of mass, must be to see how it can be made less stolid. If he does too little with it, it remains a lump ; if he does too much, it grimaces like a caricature. If he employs colour—natural colour—he is on the road which leads to *trompe - l'œil* and practical illusion. Yet all these limitations serve to define the great positive quality of sculpture, whether we call it abstraction or dignity or *recueillement*—the French word seems to sum up best the essence of our suggested terms—and it is in subordination to this quality that a true realism in sculpture must make its effects. The condition suggests an emphasis on repose rather than movement ; and this seems to be borne out by what is the chief resource of sculpture, the play of light and shade over contours that are still. Movement being, by contrast, rather an affair of line—the line that travels or defines—is more completely disengaged on the flat surfaces of painting. Ever since criticism applied itself to the *Laocoon* it has been felt that sensational, sudden, or contorted gestures were improper to the sculptor's art ; and though



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this does not proscribe all movement, it suggests that a combination of vivid gesture and minute characterisation, such as realism is so likely to aim at, would easily overleap itself. An intensely modelled portrait head, for instance, like the *Mellini* of Benedetto da Maiano, æsthetically so satisfying as it is, might very well be tiresome if it were part of a full-length figure in animated movement. On the other hand, a group so full of gesture as Rodin's *Burghers of Calais* only reaches a harmonious effect by using a good deal of simplification. Still there is no art for which it is more dangerous to lay down conditions than sculpture, though there is none in which it is more tempting ; ever since Gothic art modified the Greek horizon it has been full of surprises, and there is no reason why we should pronounce anything impossible till we have seen it fail before our eyes.

The painter, whose problem is to give us three-dimensional space in the flat, has to achieve with simplified or symbolic means what the sculptor, in virtue of his material, can do directly. For the painter, unless he is aiming deliberately at a comparative flatness of effect, must invest his

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objects with a value equivalent to that of the round. The basis of the way in which this may be done has been explained by Mr. Berenson in a chapter familiar to many readers at the beginning of his *Florentine Painters*. It is not with the tactility of tactile values, if I may put it so, that our business lies just now, nor with the particular significance of Giotto, but with the admirably lucid way in which Mr. Berenson explains how a painter who solves the three-dimensional problem has power to affect us. He says that by giving us the illusion of being able to touch his figures the painter can convey a keener sense of reality than the objects do themselves ; we ' skim off ' their material values with far greater swiftness and intensity, and feel, as we do so, a life-enhancing joy. Mr. Berenson would probably not agree that this triumph of tactile values was realism ; he would call it simply the *sine qua non* of artistic significance ; but when he says that artistic pleasure cannot begin until ' we can take for granted the existence of the object painted,' and that so only can a picture ' exert the fascination of an ever-heightened reality,' I find the most natural meaning to attach to his words is

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that there has been a success of realism. The quality he assigns to Giotto's work is just what has been described as the first phase or moment of realistic art. Suppose some one says, 'but surely you are mistaken ; realism in painting is the representation of Dutch pots and pans, or a battle-piece by Meissonier'—I should reply that by the conditions of art treatment is more important than subject, and though the commonplaceness of Dutch subjects has a value for realism, which we shall consider presently, it is the way in which painters have dealt with them that is really significant ; while in Meissonier's case, what may pass for realism is actually a different thing, namely, illustration.

Realism in painting does not necessarily mean telling a story or depicting the obvious. Its first proceeding is to confer on painted objects, by tactile or other values, the quality of existence ; not, as was explained, by way of that literal imitation which aims at pure illusion, but with enough choice and emotional insight to give us the feeling of enhanced vitality. Then, inseparable from this world of bodies which Lessing declared to be the proper theme of painting, we

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find the worlds of movement and colour, the first now laid open for a Degas to enter into it, and the second involved in the portrayal of bodies from the start, and forcing on the realistic artist almost as insistently as it does on the realistic philosopher the question whether colour is on the things themselves or is merely lent to them. It is to the actual existence of colour in actual things that realistic painting inclines ; though such patches of absolute colour are progressively modified by a realism of values. The increasing predominance of general tone or atmosphere marks a passage from realism to impressionism. Impressionism itself might be called realistic, as being a realism which has taken light as its subject ; but it also means a change of spirit and emphasis, the change from an emphasis of parts to an emphasis on the whole. Finally, figure-painting and portraiture open the field of psychical interpretation, which realism may attack, though with a use of what Professor Holmes has called the nearer rather than the remoter echoes. For realism, it is not to be denied, works always from the centre of existence and common experience, so that it cannot stray to a distance

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or use a method which experience is unable to verify.

There is a debatable region where music, painting, and drama blend ; and here the mixed arts of opera and ballet, bristling with their own problems, present themselves. Perhaps, however, they need not keep us waiting ; for whatever problems of representation they may raise, these can scarcely be called problems of realism. If opera, with Wagner and Moussorgsky, became something more than an incoherent compromise, and dancing, later on, was reborn as a true art, they were still to take us into a world which, at every turn, denies the actual. Perhaps opera, as Nietzsche said, has no intelligible æsthetic purpose except as a screen or illusion to temper for us the annihilating orgiastic effects of elemental music. It will take us then, as we say, into 'another world' ; just as a ballet by Stravinsky is a release, transporting us out of the rigid and practical into a world that moves at another pace and in a different key, with a complete, happy irresponsibility to our laws. This world is far more decorative and formal than realistic ; and the flying pattern expresses, perhaps, moods and

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emotions more elusive than those which it seems to image.

When we come to the drama we feel, by contrast, that we have reached something which centres in the very stuff of human experience. It can deal with that, indeed, quite freely ; in such a way as to give an imaginative release from ' fact ' almost as complete as music or the dance may offer. But the business of drama is rather to bite deep and straight into its material, so that it may seem to some the culminating chance for realism. It gives the visual spectacle ; the assured climax of intensity ; besides an entire or seeming absence, if carefully handled, of the mass of subsidiary intrigue and information which the novel is often caught trying vainly to digest. If the intense effect, as was hinted, is the final stroke of realism, the drama might appear to reign without competitors. Yet it is just here, as a matter of fact, that it diverges from our sense of the probabilities of life. Quite apart from that struggle with scenic conditions which the time-honoured problem of ' the unities ' commemorates, its very virtue of intensity is in conflict with our normal expectations. For the question is not only

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of character and emotion, but of a whole representation of life condensed and concentrated to the last degree and stretched to the breaking-point of tension. When the tense string breaks, as it does in tragedy, the distance which the drama has carried us away from experience is measured by the emotions and perplexities it leaves us with. The countless attempts which have been made, ever since Aristotle, to rationalise or moralise the tragic fact show how it has driven people in search of an explanation which transcends experience. The French mathematician who had been taken to see a great tragedy and came away remarking that it proved nothing, was not perhaps such a fool as he sounded, for he had certainly been carried a long way from anything he could verify. For this reason comedy, especially an universal comedy like Molière's, which borders on the tragic so closely that it may be truly called 'tragedy seen from the other side,' and yet is careful to push things no further, gives greater, or safer, chances of realistic effect than tragic drama. It is only a consummate master of realism like Ibsen who can handle drama in such a way as to give us

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the highest thrill of intensity and yet merge us so completely in the experience that at the end we ask no questions. An attempt to get out of the difficulty the other way, by relaxing dramatic tension to something like the pitch of ordinary living, is foiled because it contradicts the essence of drama ; and that is why Mr. Bernard Shaw's plays are so often not plays but well-staged, conversational lectures by a brilliant ironist.

So the novel, for all its apparent inferiorities—the absence of the visible, the lack of the clean, spare form and the highest poignancy—may perhaps excel the drama as an art of realism. It will give us intensity after its own fashion, through situation and temperament and character. It will be truer to our natural rhythm ; and where the drama condensed its action into a single rapid curve, the novel will take pleasure in an inverse movement of extension, showing us not only one deep current but the meeting of many streams, the life on the banks, the feeling of the air, the sense of a large life of which more is left than has been taken. It owes this breadth to several characteristics—its variety of possible structure ; the power of changing from a



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leisurely to a rapid motion ; and its capacity for absorbing detail, which is often, none the less, overtaxed. For representational purposes, at least, we may admit it to be what Henry James has fondly called it, ' the most independent, most elastic, most prodigious of literary forms.' The curious thing is that, for reasons partly connected with the history of art, and partly, perhaps, with its own elasticity, it should have been loth for a long time to take contact with the life it sprang from. By the law of its being it had to represent something, but it preferred many things to the delineation of people as they are and life as it actually looks to us. Yet this delineation of the actual seems to be the complete type of the novel, the one in which it really followed out the possibilities of its nature. Even the romantic Hawthorne said that the novel, strictly so called, aimed at a very minute fidelity to the probable and ordinary course of man's experience. Very likely it would be rash to assume that we have seen the final type, or, perhaps, that there is any such finality. But at least it could be said that until the novel had taken stock of the rich opportunities of the actual, and shown its powers

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of observation in a field where experience could follow it, it was but beginning its development. Not only had the phase of realism to be gone through, but the realistic element had to be inwoven into its being.

## CHAPTER III

### REALISM OF TREATMENT

Treatment and Subject—Literature; Plain Realism—Individualisation—Flaubert's Plastic Realism—Psychological Realism; Racine to Dostoevsky—Realism in Sculpture—Realism in Painting: Holbein, Vermeer, Velasquez.

TREATMENT and subject in representative art are two elements which may be parted for convenience, but always on condition of remembering that the purpose of art is to make them one. At no less a price than this perfect fusion does the artist reach, too rarely, the reconciliation of form and matter which is the glory of his work. Is it worth while, then, to separate them? For the sake of clearness it sometimes may be; and particularly here, perhaps, for a reason which belongs to our discussion.

Realism in art is often supposed to be simply an affair of subject. It would be the representation—that being understood in the sense of

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absolutely colourless reproduction—of average humanity and ordinary scenes. Or else, the same idea being emphasised a little more, it is supposed to be a picture of the intensely humdrum, or, perhaps, of those unpleasant things and moments which we habitually blink at. We may be able to see, as we go on, how much truth there is in these identifications. To be exact, what we ought to contrast with treatment is not the subject but the material. For by the time the material has become the artist's subject it has been already 'treated'; it is the material *as he sees and interprets it*.

The view that realism in art depends mainly on the nature of the material, is naturally cogent up to a certain point. Realism in art undoubtedly refers us back to a physical, existing reality. And it must be to some part of the reality which we know or can imagine; otherwise we shall not have the enhanced sense of life, the emotional verification. But within the limits of actual existence, which are always wider than we suppose, does it matter how or where the scene passes, so long as we have the recognition and the thrill? It may be in a trim Dutch parlour or

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one of Jane Austen's manor-houses ; but it equally may be on some terrific battlefield or the back street of a Russian town. The idea that realism is purely a matter of subject originates much more with critics than with artists. The realistic artists have often declared that, so far from everything depending on the choice of material, all material is in itself indifferent and offers equal opportunities to art. This is a reason for beginning with realism of treatment, not in detail as a matter of technique, but simply in order to see what are the typical ways or forms in which realistic artists have chosen to give their heightened impression of the real.

### I

#### LITERATURE

To the writer who would make us see and feel existence more intensely two kinds of method, generally speaking, suggest themselves. He may attend to what we call the outside of things, or the inside ; he can depict the visible region of behaviour and appearance, or plunge below the surface to the springs of action in feeling and

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temperament. Between these two possibilities he makes, in many cases, a fairly definite choice ; so that the bulk of realistic art would lend itself to being distinguished as either external or psychological realism. The objection—there is an objection to every classification in art—is that ‘ external ’ suggests a bareness which would not cover the more vivid, expressive kind of realisation ; for this ‘ descriptive ’ might be a better term. But then does psychological realism do anything else than describe ? It analyses, perhaps, but not in the way science does ; so that ‘ analytic ’ would be not quite a satisfactory substitute. I leave the four terms to the reader’s discretion ; but perhaps ‘ external ’—construed broadly—and ‘ psychological ’ are the safer clues.

These distinctions suggest a method already conscious of itself. There may have been, none the less, an earlier moment, when that sense of the freshness of things and of our being at one with them, which we divined in the realistic spirit, expressed itself by playing easily and naturally over all that was offered. It is the realism of mood rather than of method ; but just because it looks so effortless, and does not ‘ insist

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too much,' it has a vividness of its own by contrast with what comes after. It runs through Greek literature and art in shifting guises ; in the unconscious ' objectivity ' of Homer and the delightful curiosity of Herodotus ; with a kind of defiance, in Aristophanes, that breaks into an explosion of laughter. It seems to change suddenly, with Euripides, into the very spirit of modern questioning, piercing through the surface. Perhaps only one Roman, Catullus, repeats the absolute vitality of the Greeks. Then the current runs underground through the ' Dark Ages,' to well up before the medieval period is over in literature, and still more in Gothic sculpture and painting, no longer, perhaps, as pure joy, but as a vivid sense of fact, already converting itself into a method. The primitive delight mixes with this new expressiveness of detail in Chaucer ; and again there is springtime in the world. With Rabelais it is already summer. If he cannot be strictly called a realist by method or subject, he is one by nature and significance, by the conquests he foreshadows for art.

By his side our first methodical realists—Defoe, Crabbe, or Trollope—seem to be of a sterner

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pattern. They were not born, any of them, at such an expansive moment, and his rich profuseness was not theirs. I take them as first in the logical order, not the order of time, because the clearest plan seems to be to begin with the simplest descriptive masters and go on to the more complicated 'psychologists.' It will be found that in poetry, drama, and the novel, the logical and chronological series more or less coincide. In painting and sculpture the same kind of relation can be traced, but it will be less obvious and more broken.

The characteristics of the plainest realism are very well stated in an expressive phrase of Crabbe's, who himself was conspicuously 'plain.' Writing of Pope—Crabbe, too, was called, not very truly, 'Pope in worsted stockings'—he speaks of 'this actuality of relation, this nudity of description, and poetry without an atmosphere.' It was Crabbe's own method, and it had just the value which shrewd observation and a lively sympathy with what is genuine can have when they are held in leash by the strong desire not to be a dupe. There is sound workmanship in his human portraiture and vivid minuteness in his



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occasional glimpses of a natural sight ; but actuality and nudity remain as characteristic of his method as they had been of Defoe's. In Defoe, indeed, the lack of atmosphere, which in Crabbe we cannot help feeling as a negative restriction, appears as a most positive quality of his art ; it is evidently the way we are meant to see things, the condition of the ' actuality of relation.' By means of it he makes his clear impression, and persuades us that low life is the most natural life in the world. But an age of newspapers has wearied us of the bald recital of events ; and while the method, by its external way of viewing things, is debarred from going deep, it does an injustice to the author by seeming more imitative than it really is. By the time we reach Trollope our belief is confirmed that external realism needs colour and the amount of concreteness which is only gained by seeing further into the third dimension. It is for want of this that Barsetshire remains a geographical expression and Barchester only the *type* of a cathedral town, peopled by dignitaries whose portraits, in spite of shrewd touches, are more exaggerated than forceful.

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Another problem also defines itself for realism. Catherine the Great said that after she had taken to reading Tacitus she began to see 'plus de choses en noir.' Seeing things 'en noir' is often supposed to be the characteristic of all realism, though this would not be warranted by the meaning of the word or the practice of the greatest realists. Realism does not mean seeing things worse than they are any more than it means seeing them better than they are ; it means seeing them *as* they are. And 'as they are' means as they would look to one whose vision has the special gift of sincerity. Not, of course, the kind of sincerity which is merely passiveness agape, but an outlook which is genuinely interested by the individuality of everything it sees. For such a vision details, however indispensable, will be subordinate to wholes ; the animate (if it is a question of painting) will have a different value from the inanimate, and so on. But the realist will see more, certainly, than we are accustomed to see, and he will very likely see much that, as we say, we would rather not see. He is sure, in many cases, to see things that English people would rather leave unseen,

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because, no doubt through our determination to make the best of life and practice, we have a general reluctance to contemplate the truth in art. But this is not saying that it is the business of realism to make itself persistently unpleasant. To see the world as materialistic or miserable is not the normal outlook of realism, even if certain realists have given ground for thinking so ; it is rather the bias of naturalism, pessimism, or misanthropy. Realism usually grows grim by reaction against a sentimental view of things, and this is illustrated in Crabbe's case ; he intentionally darkened his *Village* to counteract Goldsmith's rosy tints. It is interesting, and significant too, perhaps, that both Crabbe and Trollope grow more genial as they approach the regions they knew best. Crabbe mellows in the *Tales*, where he gathers in the fruits of later personal experience. Trollope is more tolerant to his statesmen than his ecclesiastics ; the rather jaunty, heavy satire of the *Barset Chronicles* is tempered in the political novels, whose picture of the great game of politics is veracious, even if, by contrast with Disraeli's *vera historia*, it is dull.

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What we miss in these 'plain' realists is the colour and movement of the real. They show very laudably the instinct which Faguet called the 'goût du vrai'; but also its clear limitations when it remains a preference instead of becoming a passion. It is the emotional quality that they lack, and for this a different age or temperament was needed. Already, long before, Chaucer had shown how a sensitive spirit could respond to the many-coloured shapes of things, and watch for the play of character beneath them. He had chosen 'the good in things as they are' rather than 'the good in things as they might be.' His merry humour and his poetic sense combined to draw him to the actual. He felt that to get vitality in portraiture you must individualise, and he began the process. Thus another current was set going in literature which would lead from the simplest to the most intricate forms of realism. The progress in this direction would be to a great extent a progress in individualisation.

Watch it, for instance, as it shows itself in the art of Molière, Balzac, and Flaubert—for these things may define themselves more precisely in French literature than in ours. Balzac once

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boasted that while Molière had drawn *l'avare* in his Harpagon, he himself had portrayed *l'avarice* in Grandet. What he had really done, as Emile Faguet has pointed out,<sup>1</sup> was just the opposite, and it was that which he should have been proud of. Molière's Harpagon, wonderfully exhibited as he was, remained to a large extent an embodied quality ; he was the general type, made up of all the miser's traits united in one being. Balzac's Grandet, by contrast, is a *miser* ; or perhaps we should say he is a man first and a miser afterwards. He is perceptibly a more real person, with individual traits drawn more closely. But Flaubert—the comparison may hold though we have to change the quality—goes further still ; his Emma Bovary is a complete individual ; something of which we feel that it only happens once with that fulness. So we do not find ourselves reflecting, while the display goes on, how remarkably Flaubert draws the *provinciale rêveuse* ; but we think about it afterwards, when some one of the kind turns up in life or books, and

<sup>1</sup> See the essay on Molière in his *Dix-Septième Siècle*, and the study of Grandet in his *Balzac*, and Emma Bovary in his *Flaubert*.

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then we go back to Emma, with the feeling that she expressed the character, once for all, with absolute intensity and completeness. Harpagon is not so real as the people whom he typifies, but Emma is more real than the people who are like her.

Balzac was one of the greatest of creators, but not in the way of individualising character. He loved the great infatuated types, the Goriots and the Grandets, on whom a master passion has fastened with such violence that it draws every other feeling into itself. These figures, though as living as you please, are of a deceptive simplicity, for Balzac disliked the complications of real character. Where he shows himself a realist is in the extraordinary picture he gives of an organised society, of people regularly sorted into classes, interests, and occupations, and recurring so naturally and constantly that you can easily 'look them up.' That was how he chose to compete, in his own phrase, with the *état civil*. This brings us into the region of the realistic subject, of which there will be more to say in the next chapter ; it is more important in Balzac's case than realism of treatment, owing to his

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inveterately romantic turn of mind and his taste for simplified character.

With Flaubert, however, the treatment is much more significant than the subject. He had one method which he applied to the most diverse scenes—antique Carthage, contemporary Paris, nineteenth-century Normandy. It has been cleverly named plastic realism;<sup>1</sup> it is descriptive realism carried to the highest point of finish, but remaining chiefly external, and only dipping lightly into psychological analysis. Flaubert's method is wonderfully evocative, giving the look and atmosphere of things. It is calm and undisturbed in vision, for though he was a 'romantic of the imagination,' a lover of the radiant scene and the sonorous phrase, he bent his eyes sternly on the real when he began to write. But as he sets a higher value on illusion than emotion, he does not always give the supreme intensifying of reality. He fails where the characters are too remote for us to 'verify,' or where a deeper psychology is needed. *Salammbô* is a series of amazing tableaux, where the scenes with their hundreds or thousands of actors, the shapes and

<sup>1</sup> By M. Antoine Albalat.

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colours of buildings, pass almost visibly before us ; but the characters do not live, because Flaubert never overcame the difficulty which he groans over in his letters, of giving individuality to beings so remote. And in the *Éducation Sentimentale* the central figure of Frédéric misses much of its effect through the external method ; for Flaubert was avowedly writing the emotional history of a man of his generation, so that here, if ever, was a case for psychological analysis. How easily Tolstoy, going deeper, seems to succeed when he draws Levine ; or when, in *War and Peace*, he revives a whole intricate epoch, focussing it in a few intensely living figures !

But in another matter of importance the method, as he handled it, succeeded triumphantly. It carried easily all the detail needed for a precise effect, without losing itself in the insignificant. Mr. Clive Bell would have us believe that ‘ the essence of realism is detail. Since Zola every novelist has known that nothing gives so imposing an air of reality as a mass of irrelevant facts, and very few have cared to give much else.’<sup>1</sup> To

<sup>1</sup> *Art*, p. 222.



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me, I own, a mass of irrelevant facts does not give reality ; it gives boredom. What does give an air of reality is, to use a favourite word of Mr. Bell's, *significant* detail. It must be detail which counts for the general effect, that effect being vitality. 'Le réalisme bien entendu,' as Guyau said, 'est juste le contraire de ce qu'on pourrait appeler le trivialisme.' No doubt it is sadly true that, whether through Zola's influence or not—one would have supposed that no example could well be more deterrent for an artist—many later novelists have done what Mr. Bell describes, and gone in for exaggerated detail. More probably it is the effect of science, or rather that perverted view of it which believes that the particular fact, valueless for science though it may be, has a value for art irrespectively of whether it is significant or not. An instance of how a mind with a strong natural vision of detail may suffer this invasion of the trivial, is to be seen in Mr. Arnold Bennett's later work. In his earlier books he had built up with exceeding care and vivid minuteness a picture of the Five Towns and of one or two individuals in the foreground ; it was an atmosphere where character emerged, and

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some scenes—the Sunday-school centenary in *Clayhanger* competes with Flaubert's famous *comices agricoles* in *Madame Bovary*—were not easily to be surpassed in descriptive realism. But his eye always tended to see detail first and to stop there ; the uniformity of his style with its short curt phrases seems to reflect a vision for which all things are external and exclusive of each other. This habit of externality has absorbed him more and more, until, in the last volume of the trilogy, it colours his whole view of character ; for even in the Five Towns, where we are told that the cultivation of human intercourse for its own sake would have been regarded as pure lunacy, one cannot readily believe that two people could have remained so fettered to their own shadows, 'condemned to do the flitting of the bat,' as Edwin and Hilda in *These Twain*.

The border-line between external and psychological realism may be often trodden unawares. But though there are artists, like Tolstoy, who make us hesitate where to place them, whether as nearer to Flaubert or nearer to Ibsen, there is equally a group of writers about whose position on one side of the line we feel no doubt at all.

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They all have one distinguishing mark ; what absorbs them is, in Leonardo's phrase, man and the intention of his soul. Character, for instance; and, still more than character, the ebb and flow of the forces which make or unmake it. The play of impulse or motive, emotion and judgment, passion and will, in presence of each other and of other passions and wills, are only the more definite and simple part of the material they deal with ; for the hands of modern masters measure such imponderable quantities as the phases of mood or temperament which lie behind self-consciousness. This is just the place to find at work that quality of the realistic spirit which is sheer insight ; and hardly less that remorseless exploration which pierces through the fictitious reasons for an act that people pass off on themselves and others. Those who have this psychological gift cannot be prevented from showing it, and so we discover it in unexpected quarters and under odd disguises.

Racine, for instance, *le docte Racine*, may seem at first sight to give us the picture of a courtly, formal life, all in appearances, played to slow music on the terraces of Le Nôtre. But look

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below the smooth cadence of his alexandrines, and you find a play of passions which even now seems violent, and at the same time relentlessly true. His contemporaries saw the difference at once ; to many of them the melodious poet was simply 'un brutal.' What he had done was to reverse the Cartesian psychology, which made the will a calm arbiter of the passions, and was embodied, at a pitch of superhuman tension, in the stoical heroes of Corneille. Racine brought man back to the real, rudely perhaps, and with a plain emphasis on human frailty, but also with a force which could not be denied. There is no doubt, now, where the interest lies. The action, though sometimes violent enough, as in *Bajazet*, is of the simplest, and it is the pure resultant of emotion and character ; the real scene, as has been said of him, was in the human heart. Nothing is more characteristic than the way he reduces a traditional subject, full of high politics and great personages, to its elementary terms of human interest and feeling.

His realistic method, as the French critics have seen so clearly, also bridged the gap between tragedy and comedy. They were mixed of the

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same elements, and there was no essential difference between them ; all you did was to vary the strength of the draught. So one is prepared to find analogues to him in gentler regions, besides the obvious one of his contemporary, Molière. The quality of his method leads on to an artist in comedy, also disguised under close conventions and a formal manner, the most finished and most modest of our realists, Jane Austen. She, like him, was a psychologist before the fact ; she would have shrunk in horror from the study—‘ subjects of science and philosophy, of which I know nothing ’—but then she did not need to read scientific manuals in order to understand the heart. When Racine says of his *Bérénice*, itself a comedy with many touches of the Austen type, that what pleased him most about the subject was that he found it extremely simple, and again, that all invention consists in making something out of nothing, does he not suggest the novelist who spoke of herself as polishing a little bit of ivory two inches wide, and said that her ideal of treatment was to collect two or three families in a country village, and see what would happen ? There is an

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immense restraint of time, sex, and temperament about Jane Austen, and that is why Racinian shocks do not echo through her Georgian parlours. Seldom, if ever, has the share of action been more restricted. But this only makes it clearer that the real interest of it lies within. It is true that she stages character in a scene where it is greatly fettered, and that she is not interested in the flights of the soul ; yet what a picture of Fanny's inner life, for instance, is laid before us in the pages of *Mansfield Park* ! Her special contribution to realism is a sense of humour of which one knows not whether to call it more acute or more delicate ; it helped her to guess the truth, to choose what really mattered, and to remain an artist in form.

The other side of Racine, the violent side, reappears in Stendhal, though not through any imitation, for he detested the tragedian. It was the fruit of his temperament, of his search for adventure on Napoleonic battlefields and in Italian towns ; and incidentally it offers an object lesson in the relations of fact, romance, and realism. The startling and improbable *dénoûment* of *Le Rouge et Le Noir*, which Stendhal

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borrowed for romantic motives, is a fact from life ; but it is quite out of keeping with the character and situations which he had analysed with so much precision and insight in the rest of the novel. It is the borrowed fact which rings false ; and the invented part, which is also the realistic part, that is at once more convincing and more real. Stendhal unravelled with a fineness that Balzac could never rival not only the souls of his Julien Sorels and Lucien Leuwens, but the psychology of the whole post-Revolutionary generation. Nor could the coolness of an analytic mind be illustrated better than by his vivid but wholly disillusioned account of Waterloo in the *Chartreuse de Parme*, which had no parallel in literature till Tolstoy wrote *Sebastopol*.

It might be claimed for the later masters of psychological realism, like Ibsen and Dostoevsky, whom we sometimes describe rather helplessly as ' more modern,' that in comparison with these earlier writers they know more, feel more, and say more. The increased knowledge is important, for it means not only a larger acquaintance with the human heart as it has expressed

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itself in the freedom of democratic and romantic Europe, but a new documentation about the nervous system and the workings of consciousness. Yet the feeling is perhaps even more important than the knowledge, for in their case feeling, to a great extent, *is* knowing. Ibsen is a poet whose realism merges in a half-mystical symbolism ; Dostoevsky has his deep religion of charity and pity. Of the earlier writers mentioned Racine only has anything like this resource of feeling, and he had to write for a Court that was at first pleasure-loving and then sanctimonious. But the moderns speak out what is in them ; Ibsen with his bitter criticism of conventions, Dostoevsky with his utterance of the dreams and thoughts of Russia. They live more intensely in their creations ; we know how Ibsen's germinated in his mind, and were represented for him by small mysterious objects on his desk, the symbols of a violent interplay of nervous reactions. For both of them the whole interest is in psychical reality, in what is left when all the distortions of outward expression have been torn away. So it becomes unimportant what their characters do or say in comparison with what



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they are ; for the first time this soul-life is undisguisedly presented as the only thing that matters. In Ibsen's case, though this interest certainly leads to symbolism in the end, there is an intermediate phase which Maeterlinck well describes as the unspoken dialogue of souls, the emotional currents which lie behind reflection and even behind consciousness ; and we should be cautious of asking for a symbolical key to explain these simply because the ordinary one has failed. The same is true of Dostoevsky, and here we cannot take refuge in saying that 'it is all symbolical' ; we are left with an utterly unfamiliar reality on our hands, which we may not be able to explain, but cannot ignore.

While Dostoevsky and Ibsen both make a similar impression, they produce it by entirely different means ; by stretching, in fact, to the utmost limits of contrast the opposite methods of the drama and the novel. Ibsen disregards the tighter traditions of his art, and will present you, as in *Ghosts*, simply with a situation ; but no dramatist ever attended more closely to the cardinal virtue of compression. Racine

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had understood already that if the passions are your subject you must take up the action when it is advanced, but Ibsen takes it up still later ; at a point where nothing is left but for the characters to show what is really in them. By this plan he evokes, as he says, the sensation of having lived through a passage of actual experience ; and by other expedients such as reducing the five acts to three, dispensing with the scenes, and pressing the unity of time—as in *John Gabriel Borkman*, where the action passes in one night. His object is always to get more intensity through condensation. Dostoevsky, on the other hand, presents us with the novel in its most apparently formless state ; with its contrary, undramatic quality of extension carried to the furthest point. That may not be so artless as it seems, if, as was suggested, this broad and leisurely movement is one of the novel's devices for representing life. But Dostoevsky actually rambles ; and this makes us see that the realistic effect in his case is not to be explained finally, any more than in Ibsen's, by constructive technique. Both depend on their psychical insight, and Dostoevsky more nakedly

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so. What finally distinguishes him from Ibsen is his greater belief in persons. Believing more strongly in goodness he will not let them go ; personality has an absolute value for him, and he cannot sacrifice it, as Ibsen does, first to the interplay of temperaments and then to a kind of mysticism.

### II

#### PLASTIC ART

If we turn to plastic art, we should not expect to find there, after what has been said of the differing capacity of the arts for representation or realism, exactly the same distinctions or the same progression from description to analysis. Sculpture and painting are not arts of time, and they cannot depict sequences of act or feeling. Then their medium is concrete or 'plastic,' and being thus further off from the region of intellectual conceptions, they do not explain or analyse, or even, in a sense, describe. But they have the monopoly of actually seeing their subject, and this advantage may outweigh many others. And though the psychological

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divination is limited, in the case of painting, to portraits and figure subjects, it turns out in practice to have an immense fertility and suggestiveness there.

Perhaps nothing could seem more hostile, not only to a crude realism, but to the invasion of realism of any kind, than old Greek sculpture, with its devotion to ideal beauty, universality, and repose. The other kind of expressiveness would involve a close characterisation leading firmly to the individual, and a pursuit of truth going far outside the limits of accepted beauty. Still, the change is to be found working, though we follow it with difficulty at first, in mere fragments of the great masters, in copies, and the testimony of books. The *Charioteer* in the British Museum is a piece which rouses this sort of curiosity, not so much as being realistic in itself, as because it gives a plain hint of further realistic development. In the expression of emotion this development may be traced, no doubt, from Scopas. Then we are told how Lysippus set the fashion of representing forms not as they were but as they looked, which meant presumably an intentional falsification of the

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exact lines of the model to get a more living impression ; and of his brother and pupil we hear that he was the first to make a plaster cast from the model's face and then work on it, or rather on a coat of wax underneath, which sounds like a step towards realism. By whatever stages it grew, realism is a recognisable fact when we reach the later work of the Pergamene sculptors, particularly those two familiar statues, the *Dying Gaul* and the *Laocoon*. The first is perhaps as fair an instance of true realism as the latter is of false. The *Gaul* shows an expressiveness of suffering which still does not transgress the limits of the medium, and an amount of characterisation in the modelling of features, flesh, and limbs that suggests a passage from the type to the individual. The *Laocoon*, on the other hand, has lost the very first quality of sculpture, namely dignity or *recueillement*. The sculptor had chosen a theme which was sensational and was bound to express itself in restless physical contortion ; and he managed both to exaggerate the sensational quality and to be untrue to physical fact.

One of the most interesting points about the

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Greek sculptors is that they considered and rejected colour as a means of direct representation. The primitive practice, no doubt, was to colour the statue all over ; but this was given up when it was recognised that sculpture had to tell by the play of light and shade over the surface of its material. Colour, though it plays a distinct part, becomes subordinate and conventional ; it is used on the rich borders of drapery, in a quite unrealistic tinting of eyes and hair, but not (except in some instances of reliefs) over the main surfaces of the marble. Its function is to help us to see and understand these better ; but it is the uncoloured marble which does the essential work of representation.<sup>1</sup>

Though realism was neither incomprehensible nor impossible for Greek sculptors, there is nothing surprising in its having first taken root firmly in Gothic art. Indeed, if one looks at the spiritual background, one is tempted to say that there could be no complete expressiveness or characterisation until man had explored his soul more deeply and realised a private life, in dis-

<sup>1</sup> I am indebted to Mr. Gardner's *Handbook to Greek Sculpture* for much of the detail in these two paragraphs.

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tingtion from the largely civic and external motives of ancient art. Gothic art started, of course, with a great unity of purpose, by which all plastic art was pressed into service on the cathedral walls for decoration and edification ; and it had an artistic unity, less obvious than that of the Greeks, but not less genuine, to which any realism of the more deliberate kind would come, at first, as an exception and a shock. But the vital condition of a desire for expressive truth of fact was there very early. It can be seen in the sculptured figures which throng those deeply recessed porches at Chartres and Bourges ; and still more at Reims, where the ' *imagiers* ' anticipate the more definite realism of the fourteenth century. The little jokes in stone which run through Gothic carving show a mind eager to have contact with life. And the swiftly growing taste for expressive representation may be measured by the ease with which it is distorted. The smile of the angel at Reims becomes a grin under the German chisel at Bamberg. The statue of Charles v. in St. Denis, an excellent case of simple and expressive realism, contrasts with the mannerism of the realistic figures on the

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tombs there. A new characterisation comes out more clearly in the 'Well of Moses' at Dijon, and the other work of the Burgundian school. Sluter's Moses is whole worlds apart from Michael Angelo's tremendous and symbolic figure. But it has a reasonable grandeur and a character of its own; and still more individual are the companion figures of the prophets.

The beginnings which we trace in the Dijon sculptors are perfected by the Tuscans, and above all by Donatello. Whether we look at his prophets, with their strongly defined character, or a frank portrayal of physical ugliness like the *Zuccone*, or the strange way in which the drunken figure of Holofernes satisfies both truth and beauty, or a deliberate portrait study like the *Niccolo da Uzzano*, we feel ourselves in presence of a new intimacy of realism. Does this mean that beauty has been rejected in favour of characterisation and truth? That would be too sweeping a thing to say, for sculpture that was merely interesting, without being beautiful, would not have the power to satisfy. But the conception has been widened, and a beauty that



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is expressive has taken the place of formal or 'regular' beauty. Donatello has learned that one way of creating beauty is to look for truth, and to make the shape which, within the possibilities of his art, will express it. We might say of this art, which is simply realism, that it confers form on the apparently formless ; or more truly, that it discovers form where most eyes see only what is strange or ugly. Even of the *Zuccone* an Italian critic said ' tanto é bella ' as well as ' tanto é vera.'

When sculpture has reached this point it is faced by the risk which also besets painting and literature ; the risk of dropping into the naturalistic fallacy, and giving us pseudo-science instead of art. It was a temptation to which some of the painters of Donatello's time yielded, but he was too much of an artist to surrender to it, and he contented himself with truth to what he saw. A modern sculptor like Barye, living under the full impact of modern science in the nineteenth century, and intending to make all possible use of scientific method, is in a rather more delicate position. Did Barye make real tigers or ideal tigers ? Perhaps it would be hard to say ; we

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notice how he reacts against the individual, but he creates after patient observation in the scientific manner. He guarded himself, at any rate, against the danger of simply offering his 'documents' as art.

The interest of Rodin from this point of view is that, while spiritually a kinsman of Donatello, preferring the truth of nature to the truth of science, he feels his way towards a reconciliation of science and art in nature. The order which science analyses is the same that is interpreted emotionally by art. 'Geometry is at the bottom of sentiment . . . is everywhere present in nature . . . the entire rhythm of the body is governed by law.'<sup>1</sup> Full of this confidence Rodin could let the model for his *St. John* take up a perfectly artless position, not a pose. In obedience to the same spirit the *Burghers of Calais* falls naturally into a geometrical figure. Rodin's risk was that his intense belief in the coincidence of nature and art would lead him to try to express everything. Another sculptor<sup>2</sup> has called him the seer of the movement of lines,

<sup>1</sup> Lawton, *Rodin* (1907), pp. 15, 16.

<sup>2</sup> Bourdelle, *Ibid.*, p. 172.

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who leaves no scrap of his material motionless or inactive. If what was said in the last chapter about the essential *recueillement* of sculpture is true, this realism of movement may easily land the sculptor in restlessness ; and Rodin often adjusts the balance only through the large masses of unhewn material out of which his figures spring ; a device which, except where it is directly expressive, seems a confession of weakness rather than an element of strength.

Lessing's expressive, if rather naïve remark about painting, that its business is primarily to depict bodies, suggests as much as Mr. Berenson's theory of tactile values that the first quality of realism is to make us feel the existence of things. This does not mean, as I have said, trying to make us think that the painted object *is* the real thing ; though that is quite what may happen in the hands of a bad and commonplace painter. It means that the realist will try to make us see the visible, tangible qualities of the subject he is painting. It is what Holbein so conspicuously does, especially in his portraits. It may be hard, in these, to draw the line between the physical exterior and the suggested soul ; with Holbein,

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as with any great master of portraiture, the first is only the vesture of the second. He has much to tell us about the individuality of his sitters, and even more perhaps about the spirit of their time, but æsthetically his special message seems to lie in the indelible way in which he emphasises physical contour and structure. We guess the natures of his people, but we *know* their faces for actually real and individual things. Obviously, too, Holbein's emphasis on the tangible does not stop there ; we know the objects which surrounded his Merchant of the Steelyard, or the clothes which Hubert Morett wore, as intimately as we know their faces.

The point is no sooner made than one sees how easily this insistence may become tiresome, and particularly may run counter to unity of design. One of the places where one naturally looks for this kind of realistic treatment, as well as for realism of subject, is the Dutch school ; and the historian of realism would inevitably have to trace what it came to in their hands. The first and last impression is of an almost bewildering emphasis on actual things. There is less of the hardness of Holbein, and more sense of the riches

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available for pictorial treatment in every sort of object and material that can be seen under the conditions of *genre* ; of all their possibilities for colour and paint. It is a marvellous representation of discreet splendours and comfortable joys ; we are shown all the things that a given society delighted in—the things, indeed, more than the people. Is it the familiarity of all the scenes portrayed which makes us feel that the subject counts here for more than the treatment ? Partly that, perhaps ; the reposeful substance of it all is the kind of thing one is accustomed to sink back upon. But a truer reason is that it is what these painters revelled in themselves ; they seem to take the whole setting as finally and as seriously as the merchants who gave them their commissions. This is perhaps why realism as treatment, as a method of giving the feeling of highest vitality, fails us in so many Dutch pictures ; the painters did not have just that measure of detachment which may be as profitable for realism as we consider it to be for style. Their painting moves, therefore, on a slightly lower level, which we distinguish from the more vital kind of reality by calling it anecdote—the

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fragment of the story, or a scene deliberately combined.

An instance to the contrary shows that it is not because of the familiar nature of the subjects that they fail to thrill. The feeling which Terburg and de Hooch give us sometimes, Vermeer, painting the same kind of subject, gives us every time. It may be said, of course, that this is just because he is not a realist ; and if the other Dutch masters in their usual moments are the typical realists, he must count as what he has been called, 'un realiste qui s'épure.'<sup>1</sup> He is, indeed, just one of those artists who make one feel the futility of classifications. But on the interpretation of realism I have suggested it is impossible to take the painter of the *Girl at the Clavecin* in the National Gallery, the *Music Lesson* at Windsor, or the *Pearl Necklace* at Berlin as anything but a realist. He is just one of those whom Guyau describes as eliciting the poetry of common things. The reason which decides us to call him realistic is that we always feel this charm and poetry which he shows us to be something belonging to the objects he paints and to their

<sup>1</sup> Vanzype, *Vermeer de Delft*, p. 77.

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world ; whereas with Rembrandt we are pretty sure that it is another world which is being offered to us, vast and visionary. Vermeer has as good a claim to represent real existence at one end of the scale as Jan Steen has at the other.

It is one of his leading qualities that human beings are not for him more or less interesting additions to the furniture ; they dominate their accessories because they have a different kind of reality, and it is this feeling of their difference in Vermeer which gives them an enhanced life. Here, as in his unity of tone and his distinction, he joins company with Velasquez. Both are great painters of the real because they see more in it than other people ; and also not less conspicuously, because they know what to leave out. Velasquez, besides having a temperament probably more detached than Vermeer's, and the stately reticence of a court painter, had a less crowded background to deal with—a landscape, at least, as unencumbered with detail as the Dutch interiors are full of it. No realist exercises more clearly the faculty of choice ; he is always moving to a greater harmony of colour, atmo-

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sphere, and feeling, changing the vivid but piecemeal realism of *The Topers* for the impressional unity of *Las Meninas*. He is on the threshold of impressionism without committing himself to enter ; most attracted to the last by the human scene and the objects combined in it, and undistracted by scientific theory.

While Velasquez gives us an intense reality of scene, which only makes us speculate because it is so much more subtle and complicated than what our own eyes usually see, he does not try to give a corresponding realism of movement. Little Don Balthasar Carlos on his prancing horse, and the maid on the left of *Las Meninas* with her quick gesture are, on the whole, exceptions ; the long series of portraits, including the equestrian *Philip*, and even the *Surrender of Breda*, emphasise permanence instead of catching at a fleeting movement and fixing it with a dashing technique. They are thus at the opposite end of things to the volatile realism—solid enough, however, as a matter of paint—by which Franz Hals responds to a momentary gesture, or reveals, with a quiet sitter, just what he looked like then ; or to Mr. Sargent's vivid



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manner, which imparts vitality through his dexterous, impressionistic brushwork.

The realism of atmosphere which distinguished Velasquez, together with his blend of detachment and psychological insight, is renewed by Degas ; but for Degas realism means movement above all. It was not so much by a way of brushing in things like Sargent's, as by atmosphere and line, that he gave an entirely new veracity to his dancers, interpreting continuous movement, suggesting its origin, and reading the spectacle with an analysing vision as sure as that of the painter of Philip and Innocent x. ; equally awake to beauty but more disenchanted in his reading of souls. With him we are still in the domain of realism ; while with the impressionists we enter one divided between colour symphonies and the application of a theory of light. ' Things ' are wholly subordinated to values qualified by every variety of light, and the effect of this, as of the grey mist in which a London painter like Mr. Sickert bathes his figures, is to produce a feeling of extreme relativity. For impressionism has its own way of painting things ' as they look,' and it seems to challenge the realism

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which strives, however vainly, after things 'as they are.' It remains for a painter like Cézanne, who has watched the whole impressionistic development, but is still bent unwaveringly on a true statement of the world of objects, to restore the balance.

## CHAPTER IV

### FLAUBERT'S IMPERSONALISM

Impersonality and Feeling—Flaubert's Observation—  
The 'One Word'—Flaubert and Pater—The Wider  
Coherence—Truth and Beauty—Realism in Flaubert—  
Individual and Universal—Flaubert and Later Realism.

CAN the artist represent the real truly if he lets emotion enter into his work? Must not his emotion be peculiar to him and therefore something which distorts the universal truth of what he pictures—something which makes realism, as we have been considering it, impossible? This dilemma of truth and emotion has been raised already and postponed, with the suggestion that Flaubert's case would help us when the time came to probe it to the bottom. Flaubert's example is, indeed, well adapted to stir thought in those who share in any degree his preoccupation with truth and beauty and the secret of their expression through style. He converted into something positive and individual

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that 'impersonality' which might have seemed simply a negative restriction upon art. Feeling is not a thing which he lays stress on ; indeed, he often speaks of it as something which an artist would do better without ; yet we can see how it runs through his work and is evident, at least, in the stage of germination. No one strove more zealously in practice and theory to reconcile the universal and individual sides of art, and it is because he did so that his evidence is worth having on this question of feeling and the idiosyncrasy of style.

He says of his *Madame Bovary* that if it succeeded in giving an illusion it is because of the impersonality of the book. 'That's one of my principles ; one mustn't write about oneself (s'écrire). The artist should be in his work what God is in creation, invisible and all powerful. . . . And then art should rise above personal affections and nervous susceptibilities. It is time, by pitiless method, to give it the precision of the physical sciences.'<sup>1</sup> Great art was no more personal than science. Who knew anything of Homer or Shakespeare, and what could

<sup>1</sup> Flaubert, *Correspondance*, iii. 112.

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we see of Michael Angelo but 'the back of a huge old man, sculpturing at night, by the light of torches'? He found beautiful metaphors to express the calm, impersonal beauty of art, where no discordant sensibilities intruded.

'The artist's mind must be like the sea, vast enough for its limits to be invisible, clear enough for the stars of heaven to be mirrored in its depth.<sup>1</sup> . . . The finest works are serene of look and incomprehensible; in their ways they are motionless as cliffs, stormy as the ocean, full of sprays, greenery, and murmurs like the woods, sombre as the desert, blue as the sky.'<sup>2</sup>

Believing, as he did, that the highest reach of art was not to move you to laughter or tears or indignation but to set you musing, Flaubert thought illusion a better object to aim at than emotion. A strong feeling about anything was actually a hindrance to expressing it, and yet—it was the paradox of art—you must feel it first. He could, and did, feel strongly; here is a passage from a letter written while he was at work on *Madame Bovary* which shows how, with his entire self, he lived in his creations:—

<sup>1</sup> Flaubert, *Correspondance*, ii. 138.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, ii. 304.

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‘ It is a joy to write, to be oneself no longer, but to circulate through the whole of one’s creation. To-day, for instance, man and woman together, lover and mistress at once, I rode through the forest on an autumn afternoon under the yellow leaves ; and I was the horses, the leaves, the wind, the words that were said, and the red sun which half-closed eyes already bathed in love.’ <sup>1</sup>

So, while his art seemed to be contemplative both in its process and result, deep emotion was often unceasingly at work. The key to Flaubert’s union of feeling and calm, of ‘ emotion recollected in tranquillity,’ is to be found in his method of observation. For him it meant a high activity of mind and spirit. It was a penetration of the object ; he speaks of contemplating a stone, an animal, or a picture till he felt himself becoming part of it. Then the external reality would enter into him in turn and waken a poignant desire for its reproduction.

It seems a rapt musing much more than mere observation, an activity of the soul even more than of the mind ; yet Flaubert did not let it pass

<sup>1</sup> *Correspondance*, ii. 232.

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out of his control. It was truly a method, the basis of all his counsels about the way to write. The most gifted pupil he had was Maupassant, and the latter has left an account which illuminates the way of the master. For seven years he toiled for Flaubert as Jacob toiled for Laban, making ceaseless experiments in prose or verse which were, as a rule, for Flaubert's eye alone. Talent, Flaubert would say, is a long patience.

'The point is to look at what you want to express long and attentively enough to find out an aspect of it which no one else has seen or written of. There is an undiscovered element in everything, because our habit is never to use our own eyes without recollecting what has been thought previously about the object we are looking at. The least thing contains a little of the unknown. Find it. To describe a fire blazing, or a tree on a plain, we must plant ourselves before the fire and the tree till, for us, they seem unlike any other tree or any other fire. That is how one becomes original.'<sup>1</sup>

Flaubert's belief was that in the whole world there are not two grains of sand, two flies, or two

<sup>1</sup> Maupassant, Preface to *Pierre et Jean*, xxx, xxxi.

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noses exactly alike, and he tried to make his pupil describe a thing or a person in such a way as to distinguish it from every object of the same kind. The shopkeeper standing at his door, the porter smoking a pipe at his lodge, the cab-horse trotting past must be grasped and depicted in their exact particularity, so that there was no chance of their being mistaken for any other shopkeeper, porter, or cab-horse. And then, carrying out his idea that style was 'an absolute way of seeing things,' Flaubert would insist that there was only one term to express each object, one verb to describe its movements, and one epithet to qualify it properly.

What, exactly, does this theory of Flaubert's about the 'one word' mean? Is it the extreme of impersonal realism, or of what is personal and subjective? Or is it simply a matter of style in the narrowest sense—of the choice of words and phraseology? It is evidently more than the last. The vision of Flaubert taking infinite pains over the discovery of a word, writing, as happened sometimes, only two lines in two days, tends to make us think of it as an anxious labour of language, a search for what simply looked or



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sounded best. But it was not the best that he was pursuing, it was the *only* word ; which shows that the motive of his efforts was to get a perfect correspondence between words and thought or things. The thing, one's vision of it, and the term which would express it, all hung inseparably together. Putting it another way, we might say that Flaubert held more than any one to the belief that the creative process was not achieved till the right word had been found.

To some this quest for the 'one word,' Flaubert's life-long torment, may seem mere mania, or at best a counsel of perfection for the young. Here it is not so much its possibility which matters as its relation to his general view of personality and style. The question is how his 'absolute way' of imagining and writing could retain the individual accent which made it Flaubert's and no one else's, while it avoided subjective colouring and distortion. Pater, whose essay on style centres round these conceptions of Flaubert's, leaves the issue sometimes in doubt. He rallies in the end to Flaubert's watchwords, but he follows another line of thought which, with a deep truth of its own, is less clearly in agreement

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with Flaubert's view. What he insists on is that imaginative literature is not a transcript of fact, but of one's sense of fact. He lays stress on this personal view of the world as a condition of the finest art. For him the highest artistic beauty is still truth, but there is a finer truth, characteristic of the finer art, in faithfulness to a view of things than there is in the fidelity to bare fact which belongs to a humbler, plainer sort of literature. He seems to point to the art which creates out of the mind ; to the reflection of feeling which is given by lyric poetry, the dreams which romance weaves over the actual, and the complex but harmonious vision of the world which belongs to the philosopher-poet and the philosopher-novelist. This kind of art is centred in feeling or ideas.

Would Flaubert, who compares the artistic mind to a vast sea-like mirror, have accepted Pater's view ? He might have said that it is a question of emphasis. He would not have denied, for nobody could, that a thing can only be the subject of your art in the way that you see it. And he would have agreed that truth to one's vision was one aspect—was perhaps actually the

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core—of his ‘ absolute way ’ of depicting things. Certainly the unity of the mind with its design and expression is a characteristic of all good art. To be true throughout to the key in which you have felt your subject, to grasp its logical design and follow it unfalteringly, are requisites if the inner truth of art is to be made persuasive. Artistic failure, where we find it, means a break in this sequence of feeling and composition. There is nothing in Flaubert’s method to contradict this ; there is everything, indeed, to confirm it in the perfect accord of thing, thought, and word which he takes to be the goal of art. Where he differs from Pater is only in requiring a wider consistency—coherence, that is to say, with the actual, existing world around us. If we leave the matter where Pater inclines to leave it, simply as a question of consistency between the mind and its thoughts, the thoughts and their expression, we should leave out a vital part of what Flaubert taught and practised. For art, in his words, is representation ; how to represent is all we have to think of. It was a passion for picturing fact which led him from one point to another of the ‘ mundane spectacle ’ ; from rural

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Normandy to ancient Carthage, and thence back to modern Paris. His realistic art, certainly, must have all the 'fineness of truth' which Pater asks for, as without it the clearness of his mirror would be falsified. But in basing itself on the world in which we live, Flaubert's art traces a larger circle, including Pater's ideal as the greater included the less. Pater declares that the artist's mind should be at one with itself; Flaubert that it should be at one with itself and with all that surrounds it. It was the thing, the reality observed, which decided the colour of what he wrote, and was constantly there as the criterion for truth of expression.

This seems to have been Flaubert's practice almost always, and it is a side of his theory which we seldom lose sight of in the *Correspondance*; yet there is not less clearly another side. If truth was his mistress, so also was beauty. As Faguet puts it, imagination was his muse and reality his conscience. Though Flaubert would doubtless have agreed that truth and beauty met together and were finally one, their claims on the imperfect human agent were so far distinct that beauty would appear to him as the sole end of

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art. Occasionally he urges this ideal in a way which seems to give the world of the artist's vision a private and capricious colour. Poetry, he says, is a way of looking at external things, a special organ which sifts matter, and, without changing it, transfigures. Look at the world through those glasses and it will be coloured with that tint, and the phrases which express your feeling will have a necessary relation with the facts that caused it. The anecdote which Maupassant tells about *Un Cœur Simple* is an instance of how truth and beauty might appear to lead different ways. After Flaubert had read the story aloud to his friends, the passage in which the old woman confuses her parrot with the Holy Dove was criticised as being too subtle in idea for a peasant's mind. Flaubert reflected, and admitted that the criticism was right ; ' only . . . I should have to change my phrase.' It was a question of about twenty lines. Flaubert sat up all night, covered many sheets of paper with corrections and erasures, and finally changed nothing, not having been able to make another phrase whose rhythm satisfied him.

Perhaps this was not so much a victory of

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beauty at the expense of truth as a confession that both had failed here. Flaubert kept his beautiful rhythm, but he missed the truth of fact and the consistency of his idea, and with them whatever beauty they might have. But the moral of it is also that truth in art is not the same as truth in science, since a work of art is nothing if not emotionally true. Literature must communicate the æsthetic or emotional effect through words, and to Flaubert, the artist of language, the thing most to be trusted in was a perfect phrase. For the rest, he would have been the first to confess himself an unprofitable servant. How many apparently perfect phrases had he not sacrificed in obedience to a higher beauty and a more stringent truth !

The higher beauty was a perfect fitness and symmetry by which the subject and expression became one ; the more stringent truth suggested the fearless impartiality of science. He often says that the day of the ' beautiful '—of formal beauty—is over for the present, and that art will become more and more ' exhibitional ' (exposante), representing the things it sees in all their completeness. He was saved from actually

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confusing art and science through his belief in getting to the bottom of a subject by an emotional penetration which went beyond scientific analysis ; and not less by his belief in victorious expression through style. If we compare him to other men of letters he will seem coldly methodical and contemplative. But if we put him by the side of a man of science we see that he is emotional and works through feeling, as every artist must do if he is to give æsthetic pleasure. His loyalty to both truth and beauty places him in a central position ; it is as though we looked up avenue after avenue to find him always standing in the middle.

This was possible for a man who thought that the whole world was a work of art, to reproduce whose processes was the artist's function. 'Extract poetry from anything you please ; it lies in everything and everywhere.' Flaubert's æsthetic belief leads him to a superb trust in the things that came before him. Instead of shrinking from the suffering and deformity to be seen in a hospital he is moved to enthusiasm by these 'belles expositions de la misère humaine.' He was moved because all disguises had been torn

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off ; there was nothing more to hide. The sight of reality unvarnished at once excited in him the passion to represent it with an equal truth. So far from finding such themes too repulsive he could hold them a means to greater beauty ; but he would have recognised that this virtue did not lie in the ' misery ' itself, but in the stimulus to truth of expression suddenly kindled by the crudity of the sight.

With all the romantic, unregulated elements of his mind he longed for splendour and exotic beauty, as one may find it in the East, but again and again his feeling for truth as the firm base of art led him back to the subjects at his doors, and not only to those which held the seed of tragedy, like *Madame Bovary*, but to such a typically bourgeois one as the *Éducation Sentimentale* where tragedy seems to dissolve in the shallow commonplaceness of human nature. These subjects were less luxuriantly beautiful, but they gave the opportunity for greater truth. As such he takes them, and it is because in pursuing them he subdues his instincts to this binding law, and obeys the same law, so far as he is able, with antique far-away subjects like



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*Salamambo*, that it seems reasonable to claim him as a realist. The disgust which he often expressed for contemporary realism must not mislead. Undeniably he refused to be classed as one, and even went so far as to say that it was through hatred of realism that he had undertaken *Madame Bovary*. But the 'realism' to which he objected was something entirely different from the realism we are discussing here. He identified it first with Champfleury's lifeless efforts, and then with the deformations of Zola and the Goncourts. He felt, quite truly, that his method was not the same as theirs, and he went in terror of having it supposed that the *naturalistes* were his disciples. Between naturalism, with its pseudo-science and its preoccupations, and Flaubert's plastic and impersonal art, there was certainly a gulf. But Flaubert's ideal of impartially representing things makes him almost the typical example of a wider realism.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> In so saying, I bring myself, I know, under the same condemnation as is pronounced on Faguet by Mr. Sturge Moore, whose chapters on Flaubert in *Art and Life* must have been read with profit and delight by every student of the French master. But the realism I am pleading for is wider than that which Mr. Moore had in mind ; and, granting the ultimate inadequacy of labels, I still think it characteristic of Flaubert's work.

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For his plan of keeping the preferences and caprices of the artist out of his work is, to start with, the negative condition of all realistic art. He lays this law on himself, yet he does not imagine it simply as a restriction. The absence of the artist's whims means the presence of the subject and its possession of his soul; pre-occupations do not trouble him because they are silenced by a more important interest. It is the 'penetration of the object,' the passion for its true representation, which really guarantees his impartiality. There was no chance of even beginning a thing well until it had 'entered into his constitution.' This grasp of the subject and entire freedom from prejudice is the ideal, of course, for every artist and thinker.

In the *Tentation de Saint Antoine* Flaubert himself showed, or tried to show, that this impersonal representation could be applied to ideas just as well as to persons and things. But what gives the method its peculiar force with Flaubert and settles the realistic nature of his art is that he always returns to the actual and models his creations upon the existing world. Or it would be truer, perhaps, to say that he

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does so in every case but one ; for in his last book, *Bouvard et Pécuchet*, he threw impartiality aside and gave free, romantic rein to his contempt for stupidity. If he fails in objective truth elsewhere—in the *Éducation Sentimentale*, for instance—it is not so much because prejudice has betrayed him as because his psychological gift is not keen enough to penetrate every kind of type or provide him with sufficient zest for doing so. But no one who summed up his work would refuse to admit that his practice as a whole steadily confirmed his theory.

And there is a remarkable thoroughness in the theory itself, even when allowance has been made for all the *boutades* and inconsistencies scattered broadcast through his *Correspondance*, for he never methodised his principles. His phrase about the world being a work of art may serve as the basis of it all. For him beauty—the same beauty which we find in art—is one of the fundamental characters of the world. Art simply retraces a process which is universal. This real beauty in things you could find everywhere if you had eyes to see ; though it might not be always so manifest as it was in Greece, where

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the very mountains of Attica had the forms of sculpture. He seems to believe, as Pater says, in a pre-existing harmony between ideas and language ; and more than that, in a harmony between existing things and the words or shapes by which art represents them. 'As in living creatures the blood, nourishing the body, determines its very contour and external aspect, just so, to his mind, the *matter*, the basis in a work of art imposed necessarily the unique, the just expression, the measure, the rhythm—the *form* in all its characteristics.'<sup>1</sup> Having this inherent truth for its essence, style could fairly be called an 'absolute way' of seeing things. What the great artist does is not so much to weave arbitrary fictions out of his own brain as to discover aspects or relations of the real which have not been perceived by others.

This is Flaubert's impersonalism. Instead of saying that the style is the man, it would be truer to say that style is subject and treatment, united, in Pater's words, by 'all the colour and intensity of a veritable apprehension.' Yet the style *is* the man in the sense that Flaubert's art

<sup>1</sup> Pater, *Appreciations*, pp. 34, 35.

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proves to be none the less individual and his own. The uniqueness of the result is the best answer to any who would urge that art like his might be true, but could not possibly be distinguished. It is certainly a paradox of art that Flaubert, who so strove to efface himself, who painted in so dry a light and was so shy of ideas and enthusiasms, should have left work stamped with a seal as unmistakable as any in the last century. If we ask how the miracle could be performed the answer would have to be that it is one of those riddles of creation which are not to be finally explained. Philosophers might tell us that such 'impersonal' art turns out to be really personal in the highest degree, since the true self then appears, lifted above the turbid flow of passing interests or deceptions. But even without making that assumption the result is exactly what we should expect from Flaubert's idea that art follows the universal process. For if living things only find a place in the world through being individualised, the human artist and his work will be individual also.

Sometimes Flaubert seems like the last of the great classic artists, sometimes like the forerunner

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of what is altogether new. His æsthetic was new in its profound sense of truth and art ; *Madame Bovary* and the *Éducation Sentimentale* were things which had not been done before. But if they are repeated now it is with a difference. Except in *Madame Bovary*, how limited Flaubert's realistic intensity seems when compared with that of the Russians ; how different, even, is the road followed by our younger realists. His isolation is the price of his impersonalism ; he carried detachment to a degree which we no longer want to emulate. It is not that he detaches himself from the objects he represents, but that he and they tend to detach themselves from the pulse and movement of life. He was a hermit of art, and seems often to be surveying life through thin, fine glass. The first difficulty, that of feeling in and with his subject, he triumphantly overcame ; the second, that of making us feel that his creations are intensely living, he did not always master.

A newer art seems to have shown that this regulated achievement is not the last word of realism. The highest thrill of vitality comes only when all indifference is discarded, and we

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see that the artist is 'no artist merely, but a man,' intensely implicated in the business of living which he describes, and seeking artistic expression because that is the only way in which he can make terms with life. So the poignancy rises, until in a case like Dostoevsky's we make a contact with reality which baffles the conventional standard. So far as it illuminates the secret springs of human nature we are content to call it realism. But evidently it brings us close to a point where the personal vision is so significant as to transcend any realistic interest in the thing portrayed.

## CHAPTER V

### REALISM OF SUBJECT

Extension of the Subject in modern Realism—Its predominance in Balzac—His control of it—Similar developments in England—The Problem of Ugliness—Gissing and Gorki—Rodin's Paradox—Ugliness and Form—Cases where Subject predominates: Portraiture, Dutch Painting.

THERE are not, in literature, any fine subjects for art. Yvetot is as good as Constantinople.' Thus Flaubert, in a passage of his letters,<sup>1</sup> declares his indifference to the choice of subject. Elsewhere he pushes it to the point of saying that for pure art there is no subject at all, nothing but style, 'an absolute way of seeing things'; and it was his ideal to write a book without a subject, which should live and move simply by the breath of style. He never did this, perhaps because it was impossible, and also because he was fatally attracted by the

<sup>1</sup> Flaubert, *Correspondance*, ii. 293.



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real. Yvetot, a mere town in Normandy, *was* as good as Constantinople, although he hated it ; and hate was as good a motive for picturing reality as love, being, in fact, only the other side of the same inextinguishable attraction.

It is in this sense of the equal value of all subjects, rather than their equal flatness, that we should interpret the other testimonies of the men of his time ; those of Gavarni, for instance, who, if not an artist of the highest flight, was more suggestive as a theorist than most. ‘ What is beautiful ? what is ugly ? ’ asks Gavarni. ‘ Everything. Where is poetry ? Everywhere.’<sup>1</sup> This sudden widening of the range of the subject, stretched so as to include anything as a possible theme, brings a host of fresh interests into art. The balance is thrown for the moment on the side of the things represented. What the ‘ subject ’ seemed to have lost by the declaration that no branch of it was particularly excellent, is more than compensated by the masses of new material with which it is now enriched. And though, as was suggested in the last chapter, ‘ subject ’ may not be the essence of realism,

<sup>1</sup> Saint-Beuve, *Nouveaux Lundis*, vi. 183.

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it becomes powerful enough to affect the whole trend of representative art.

The way in which this process worked itself out in France is particularly worth watching, not only as a salient case in the history of a method, but as the source of developments which still influence us. It began when Daumier and Gavarni brought a fresh range and reality into satiric art, and Balzac sat down to compose the *Comédie Humaine*. Balzac is the person who practises most literally the maxim just quoted from Gavarni. For his plan, as Henry James has told us, 'was simply to do everything that could be done. He proposed to himself to "turn over" the great garden from north to south and from east to west; a task—immense, heroic, to this day immeasurable—that he bequeathed us the partial performance of.'<sup>1</sup> Balzac's own words best show that, so far from being an overstatement, this is only the barest summary of the case. Of merely *one* compartment of his *Comédie*—the *Études de Mœurs*—he writes that 'it will represent every social effect, without omitting a single situation of life, a single physiognomy or

<sup>1</sup> Henry James, *Notes on Novelists*, p. 88.

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character of men or women, way of life, profession, social sphere, region of France, or anything whatever in childhood, age, maturity, politics, justice, or war. That having been laid down, the history of the human heart traced thread by thread, the history of society written in all its parts, you have the basis. It will not consist of imaginary facts, but of what happens everywhere.' <sup>1</sup>

On the top of this huge construction were to be imposed two other 'layers,' the *Études Philosophiques* and *Études Analytiques*, and then 'man, society, and humanity will be described, judged, and analysed without repetition in a work which will be, as it were, the Thousand and One Nights of the West.' This was, indeed, an astonishing *gageure*. We know now the gaps in the performance, but we also know the ground it covered, and that what was done has the firmness of an organised world. The evident thing was that Balzac's plan could not be carried out, or even attempted, without giving the subject a significance it had never had before. Instead of composing more or less irresponsible variations

<sup>1</sup> Balzac, *Lettres à l'Étranger*, i. 205.

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on the actual, or flying to cloud-capped towers of romance that had only the slenderest attachment to it, he undertook to make the whole of social life expressive. It would be imaginatively seen and dealt with, but it was to be the real, not a shadowy world invented by Balzac. He took the vastest subject, and hymned its glories, and was content if he were swallowed up in the result.

It is this necessary predominance of the subject, from the moment he so conceived it, that makes it difficult to accept entirely Henry James's sharply dual view of his mind, as 'originator' and 'reporter.' The great novelist and critic who is superficially so unlike Balzac, and yet felt himself so near to him, was anxious to save all that could be saved for him on the side of treatment and imaginative freedom ; and he tries to save too much. Balzac would certainly not have felt ' that the reporter, however philosophic, had one law, and the originator, however substantially fed, has another '—because, in his case, the reporter *was* the originator. It was only in their entirety, with all their social appendages, incomes, and relations, that Balzac

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could, and did, create his characters. It is when the romantic fibre, which was still strong in him, gets the mastery that he plays havoc with his subject and produces extravagances like the *Histoire des Treize* and the greater part of the *Splendeurs et Misères*. Whenever he is at his best he is fettered to the subject, though not, if we may qualify Henry James, as its hopeless slave, but its natural exhibitor ; for this was the form in which he was born to create.

At the same time, the fact that one can speak of him as fettered suggests that his subject overpowered him ; and we often feel heartily that it did. Only the chief reason for his failure does not seem to be that he was groping with an inartistic purpose after facts that did not belong to art, but simply that he was attacking a subject too big for a single artist to fuse. I have wilfully simplified James's account to make this clearer ; there will be no difference of opinion about the conclusion, that Balzac's enterprise left him with lamentably little room to turn round or enjoy a liberty of mind. If we take him strictly at his own valuation, there would be a good deal to justify the view that he was trying for a result

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foreign to art. The immense programme of the *Comédie Humaine*, and its no less immense assumptions—the claim to trace ‘causes, effects, and principles,’ to give ‘the poetry and demonstration of a whole system’—sound remarkably like a course of sociology. Phrases like ‘I shall be right or I shall be wrong’ suggest that Balzac thought he was trying to prove a scientific hypothesis. But it is at this moment, to borrow James’s simile, that we catch Balzac’s wink to his fellow-augur. The scientific parade is the vesture rather than the substance of his artistic undertaking.

It does, none the less, arrest us that he should have thought of his work in this way; and it marks a new crisis for realism. The moment when the real and the whole of the real first emerges definitely as the subject is also the moment when it borrows the scientific manner. And Balzac’s words suggest that the second fact is somehow the cause of the first. It was not for nothing that he drew up the prospectus of his *Comédie* in the same year that Auguste Comte delivered his *Cours de Philosophie Positive*. The social and political applications of science,

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especially the historical method, were in the air, and Balzac was sensitive to them. He really did give something like 'the poetry and demonstration' of sociology by constructing a whole society of people which hung together as no novelist's world had done before ; in which you could trace, if you cared to follow it, every social interest at work. Then, too, with his conservative opinions—and how he lets us know them !—he appears under another light as the fellow of minds like de Maistre, St. Simon, and Comte, who in their different ways were striving to build up a social and spiritual power that should fill the waste places of the Revolution. It is in the hugeness of his programme, perhaps, that he comes nearest to the founder of Positivism; if there was any writer of the period as deeply stricken with megalomania as Comte, it was Balzac.

Still, when these reserves have been made, we do not feel that he has taken the fatal plunge from art into theory as Zola was to take it after him. It was the way of his mind to make such claims, and it was also the cast of his ambition. He dreamed of nothing less than 'to govern the

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intellectual world of Europe,' or *conquérir l'existence princière de M. de Talleyrand*. The form he gave to his work did, indeed, dangle before his successors very obviously the temptation to emulate or copy science ; it will be seen how Zola, beginning where Balzac left off, spent his life in pursuing a fallacy. But the more pervasive influence of his art—the one which has passed into all our books and our whole way of looking at things—was a lawful consequence of his way of regarding his material. The result of representing 'everything' as copiously as he tried to do was to throw up in high relief all the parts which had not been represented before. These were the actual, not to say the material and the calculable—the whole structure and setting which his predecessors had either left shadowy or turned their backs on. This comprises the professions, incomes, and interests of his characters ; the ramifications of family and the influence of place ; the art of living and the art of getting on—for though the love interest survives in Balzac, generally as a destructive passion, his new and ruling motives are money, power, and social competition. Money above all ; his



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life was a struggle against mountains of debt, and it had eaten into him.

Having a mind tempered to hard facts much more than subtle reflections, and seeing his characters always as social beings rather than as individuals, he was bound to give this tone to his work. He shows, for instance, how a passion operates all round the possessed—the social shuffle it causes, as well as the emotional havoc. But his consistency, control, and knowledge—he was not a ‘reporter’ in the sense of taking notes; he really took it all in by the pores—make the solid fabric he created quite equal to meeting these demands. He has a world of his own; but it is not a fictitious one so much as the world of the French Restoration amazingly revived and charged with universal interest. One is perplexed to say whether he interpolates his characters in this real society or whether he creates the society over again with his characterisations. It is, anyhow, by projecting himself into the real that he lives up to the words in which he best described his special purpose—to ‘compete with actual society,’ *faire concurrence à l'état civil*. Like other great novelists

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he can make us forget our world ; but he alone, or almost alone, does it by offering one in exchange which is as solidly organised as our own.

We might say, then, that Balzac aimed at the representation of everything, and laid a great emphasis on the parts of life which had not been described before. The same kind of revolution had begun already in England, though it worked in the opposite way. Wordsworth, essaying themes which had not received justice before, accustomed us to the representation of everything. His partnership with Coleridge in the *Lyrical Ballads* is an amiable competition between the spirits of realism and romance, which points to the victory of the former. Coleridge left one or two wonderful poems, bathed in a magical, supernatural light ; Wordsworth began that large body of his work which was ' to give the charm of novelty to things of every day.' Counting by the total impression, it is Wordsworth who was victorious. He tells us that he chose the ordinary tenor of humble and rustic life because that is where essential passions are strongest ; where they speak the plainest language and can be watched most accurately. It would

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be very misleading to sum up Wordsworth as a pure realist, and I do not pretend to do so. I would only recall the trite fact that he immensely reinforced what Burns and Crabbe had suggested, and showed that there was no theme too insignificant or familiar to receive the kindling touch of poetry.

There is a delightful passage in Wordsworth's preface to the *Ballads*, where he claims all things, especially all scientific discoveries, as the possible field of poetry, though what he foreshadows was first to be attempted boldly by another art:—

‘ The objects of the poet's thoughts are everywhere ; though the eyes and senses of man are, it is true, his favourite guides, yet he will follow wheresoever he can find an atmosphere of sensation in which to move his wings. Poetry is the first and last of all knowledge—it is as immortal as the heart of man. If the labours of men of science should ever create any revolution, direct or indirect, in our condition, and in the impressions which we habitually receive, the poet will sleep then no more than at present ; he will be ready to follow the steps of the man of science, not only in those general efforts, but he will be at

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his side carrying sensation into the midst of the objects of the science itself.'

It was the novelists, as might be expected, who still more energetically than the poets brought men back to the common world from which romance had lured them. Jane Austen, resolutely intent on her small country circle in the very noonday of romanticism ; George Eliot, picturing English provincial life with a breadth which we cannot help calling realistic, even while we more than suspect her of a moral purpose ; Dickens, rioting in the humours of the vulgar—they all showed in their own ways that ordinary life was worth imaging and dreaming of. We took from their hands the country-house, the farmhouse, the lodging-house, the shop, and the inn parlour, and found that they were amusing after all, and that art might as well admit them as eschew them. The prestige of science had its effect on us, though less strongly than on the French ; the French masters made themselves felt, and produced at least one brilliant imitator of the French manner, George Moore. But we did not, like the Frenchmen, concentrate on the seamy and the sordid as the realistic subject

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*par excellence* ; and still less were we disposed to bind ourselves to exhibit a theory or programme. It was much more consistent with our way of looking at things to treat the habitual and the commonplace as what was particularly real. This seemed a natural view to take of 'realism of subject,' for there were national inclinations to support it—our belief in custom, in silent growth and modest worth, our sense of social atmosphere, tending to compromise and avoiding all 'logical consequences' like the plague.

What art can do with the even tenor of life is to show that it is good and pleasant after all, that nothing is commonplace except to the man whose perceptions have been dulled by habit. This is just what Guyau declared to be the function of realism—a stripping off of the veils with which, absorbed in cares or riches, we have covered the disinterested beauty of the world. Even this may have its difficulty for a people who regard the world mainly as a place to do things in ; but it is congenial because it reassures us that the doing was worth while and the scene of our doings was very good. So we can go back with joy to Jane Austen and her small country-houses, or to

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George Eliot's solid exhibition of provincial character, feeling that whole regions of life have been reclaimed for us and we can now renew them in the same way. But there is a difference between the ways in which romanticism and realism unfold the riches of the world. The former says that what is fair and splendid must be real ; the latter, that what is real may be fair and splendid.

Gradually influences which were mostly foreign diverted us from this refreshing of commonplace things towards an unfaltering exhibition of what was grim and squalid. So much so that even now nine-tenths of those whom one might question would say that misery of some kind must be the chief ingredient in realism of subject. If this means that the first impulse of realism is towards a world of misery or brute matter it appears to be a complete mistake ; nor would it be any truer to say that the representation of these themes is the *main* business of realistic art. But it is true that one tendency of realism is to represent pain and evil, and this is where what we have called realism of subject seems to assert itself. The dark element in things is not, indeed,

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a tinge of colour which the realistic artist gives to everything ; it is something which he finds appearing and reappearing in the world, and reveals faithfully. The question which is then raised for realism is simply this : is there a special value in the due representation of the painful side of things ? It is clear that an art which ignored this element would lack savour, contrast, and tragedy ; and it is equally clear that such an art would not even be real. It would have no claim any longer to represent the world. The painful is, in a sense, the very nerve of representation, for it is just the stuff from which a merely pleasant art will shrink. Therefore by grasping it, and exhibiting it for what it is, and all that it is, realism introduces a fresh quality into art ; it shows by the most poignant means that there is an æsthetic value in truth. So long as art moves in the region of what is habitual or agreeable it can accept its material instinctively and hardly raise this last criterion. But if, when challenged by what looks forbidding, it embodies this too without disguise, obviously it has met and overcome a difficulty ; and reality so recognised and endorsed is truth.

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The realistic art, especially the realistic literature of the last half-century, boldly faced the problem of ugliness, which few had attacked before save one or two great painters. It did not explain ugliness away or try to soften it, even while it was largely expanding our notions of the beautiful. But while refusing to merge evil and ugliness in natural beauty, it showed that they could be so represented as to produce an artistically beautiful result. Gissing and Gorki—to take two contrasting instances—each mastered the difficulty in his own way. Gissing's material is flatly unpromising, Gorki's is defiant in ugliness and chaos. What becomes of it in their art? We can hardly say that it receives a varnish, or is submitted to the processes which Flaubert called 'pruning' and 'sweetening.' It remains what it is, and yet somehow takes its place in a new whole of beauty. If we try to analyse our impression, the first element seems to be a sense of satisfaction or even triumph that a man can thus hold gloom and suffering at a distance, contemplate them and picture them in art. It is a feeling of calm which brings us a relief from the weight or pain of physical necessity. This is



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only a reflection of the calm which was needed to create the work of art and give it form. Then there is a more vivid element—probably the first we were actually aware of—which seems to spring from a new, disinterested emotion, born in the work of art. It is the emotional tone or colouring given to it by the writer's temperament. We call it disinterested if we feel that the representation is sincere, and sincerity does not rule out great differences in the artist's relation to his subject. Gissing is more submerged in his environment than Gorki; he is still under the same spell as his characters, imprisoned behind barriers which he cannot pass. Therefore his mood is mainly passive, his key the minor; the restraint is more felt in his work, yet it is full of a controlled intensity. Gorki's impulse is buoyant and active, an elastic spirit responsive to his themes, with their broken outlines, high lights, and deep shadows. So he excels in imaginative richness of form, while Gissing's strength is in the more intellectualised elements of composition and style. But neither has tried to disguise the nature of his material, and we might almost sum up the process and result in some words of Gorki's

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own, from his story *Anguish*. We can imagine him saying with his maimed musician :—

‘ We must begin with sadness, to put the soul in order, force it to give attention.’

And when the climax has been most intense, the reader may end by echoing the cry of Gorki’s distracted miller :—

‘ I can bear no more. In Christ’s name, I can bear no more ! You have pierced my soul. Enough—oh, my anguish ! My aching heart—you touched me there . . . that is to say, that never in my life have I had an hour of this kind.’

There is too much havoc in this outcry, too little of that real feeling of relief noticed before, to make it seem the invariable effect of this type of art ; but it shows, at any rate, the directness with which the writers depict a harsh reality.

In both cases ugliness has stimulated the creative instinct and suggested a possible beauty, just as it did to Flaubert when he looked at the sad sights in Rouen hospital, and mused over those ‘ belles expositions de la misère humaine.’ As it is an actual harshness or squalor which

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provides the material and prompts the form, we should be so far justified in calling them examples of 'realism of subject.' The realistic subject is felt to reveal and impose itself.

The same thing may happen in painting or sculpture, and Rodin will even tell us that the uglier a thing is in nature the more beautiful it becomes in art. And he explains this in a way which is perhaps as good a reading as has been given of the central problem in representative art. 'What is beautiful in art,' he says, 'is, in fact, simply that which has character. Character is the truth of some natural sight, beautiful or ugly, in all its intenseness; it is even something that might be called a *double truth*, for it is the truth of the inward translated by the truth of the outward; it is the soul, the emotion, the idea expressed by the lineaments of a face, the motions and actions of a human being, the tones of a sky, the lines of a horizon.'

One reason why these words of Rodin are enlightening is because they rid us for a moment of the contrast which is so often made and is so commonly misleading, between form and expression as rival elements of beauty. Form *is*

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expression. It is the only way in which we can recognise matter, being in fact the stamp or 'character' impressed on a thing which makes it individual. If we want to point a contrast it is safer to draw one between design and meaning, or pattern and feeling, for these are the elements which art unites—but we can see at once that if they were as separate as we seem to make them in the contrast they could never come together. They never are so separate. The form which is expression, which reveals the nature of a thing, is simply a higher power of what we call pattern or design ; it *uses* pattern, works in that way, but is dealing all the time with an unseen content of suggestion, not merely with such factors of physical stimulus as a bright colour or an arabesque.

The question remains, and will very likely be asked as long as the world lasts, why the sudden revelation of truth in art should have an emotional effect ; why what is true should also be beautiful. For we cannot really contrast what Rodin calls character with beauty as something alien and distinct. It is true that as we stand before a work of art which seems strange

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or curious or difficult, we may feel nothing but interest or wonder ; but it is also true that an eye more skilled to read the symbols can at once see beauty there, and that in the presence of hundreds of subjects which were ugly in nature we have the indefinable but unmistakable experience which we know as the experience of beauty. The head of the soldier in Mr. Epstein's 'Tin Hat,' with all its honesty, is brutal and stupid, the shell helmet is cocked awry ; but though the bronze shows us these things, and also the tyranny of pitiless events, they are not our first or last impressions ; they are fused in a single perception, which is one of pleasure at this vivid form. To say that we feel this pleasure, however, is only to restate the enigma without solving it ; and perhaps, as was said just now, it can never be solved. Still, when we reflect we can disengage here, as we did with Gissing and Gorki, the same feeling of relief, evoked by something disinterestedly seen. Ugliness is no longer simply painful or disturbing ; it expresses something new. It will not do to declare, as some theories do, that ugliness is always inexpressive. On the contrary, it often suggests

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something quite definite, such as disease or weakness or depravity, which is painful or menacing to us ; and these suggestions, expressed by a defect or extravagance of shape, are the cause of our disliking it. But art frees it from this personal emphasis ; and what was previously unpleasant to us becomes now a thing which exists in its own right ; which we see no longer from our point of view but from its own, as a centre of fresh emotional relations.

More than this, it has been endowed with a new, mysterious life. Art releases us from those activities of living which are practical or disturbing, and yet it is always the living element in art which calls us back. How can this be ? It is almost a truism to answer that it is because the life we find in art is not mere *living*, which often seems aimless, but is the expression of a creative act. The vision or imagination of the artist sees something in the object which we had not seen, and gives it life. And as the object is dumb, or indeed is *nothing* for art till his kindling activity has touched it, he really creates what he shows us. It is his feeling in union with the material before him that makes his 'subject' ;

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and when his work is most creative, most new to us, it is because he has connected various traits of the thing which we had never thought of together, or never perceived at all. The form in which he expresses his vision is a new one, though it retains the lineaments of the old. The dwarfs of Velasquez are still misshapen ; but the painter's sympathy has set free in them a store of unexpected values.

It is clear at this point, as we had more than suspected, that an absolute distinction between realism of subject and realism of treatment cannot really be maintained. Just when the realistic subject seemed to impose itself in its native ugliness, we find that we have to insist on the importance of the treatment. The ugly subject, in fact, spurs the artist to a corresponding deeper realism. There are certainly cases where ugliness provokes the artist to mere reproduction rather than critical sincerity ; but these, as we shall find in the next chapter, are cases of bad art. How much can we claim, then, as realism of subject ? If it appears impossible in the end to say that any effect is due *merely* to the subject, we are still left with the cases in which the

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emphasis, at least, lay on that side. Certain moments in the development of art, like that of Balzac and his successors, when new interests and new material are all-absorbing ; certain aspects of the *triste* or the habitual which seem to have a special power of enforcing themselves. Some might add to these a particular branch of art—for instance, portraiture. The case of the portrait is worth considering, as it is just because the subject is held to predominate there that some have pronounced it to be a mixed art, or hardly art at all.

It is only with the Renaissance that portraiture, having shaken off the conventional types which debased it in later Roman sculpture, emerges as a separate form of art which stirs reflection. But it is not in the least likely that the painters and sculptors of the Renaissance thought of it as such a distinct branch of art as we do, or that it vexed them with our perplexities. These have arisen because portraiture has proved much the easiest way for artists to make money, and a vast mass of work has been produced which has really no interest except the commercial one of supply and demand. Hence the question as to whether



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portraiture is art at all ; whether, in most instances, it is not 'all subject.' Of course, if the transaction has been so far simplified that the artist is taking money to polish off a subject which does not interest him and which he does not trouble to understand, art has nothing to do with it and there is no more to be said. But the artist who retains a liberty of choosing his sitter is not obviously more at the mercy of his subject than an artist of any other kind. Even where, as the case of Philip IV. and Velasquez, the model is imposed on the painter, a long intimacy and affection may supply the place of sympathy and choice. When the portrait-painter has found his subject it is not clear why it should 'dictate' to him any more than a landscape does to the man who paints it. In both cases the task is to interpret something in the form of art. The chief difference seems to be that portraiture, with its definitely human subject, carries a larger quantity of suggestions and associations along with it. These may be of the kind often thought to be distracting or irrelevant to art. But there is reason for holding that portraiture is just the one case where these associations cannot be

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irrelevant, because they fall within the subject, not outside it ; they are part of the general stream of influence whose share in the individual's character the artist feels. To him they may all be of value, as illuminations, not distractions ; the discovery of the *essential* associations and suggestions is really part of his task.

The test of comparing a portrait-painting with a photograph is a very obvious one, but nothing throws up the æsthetic quality of portraiture better, for it shows how the photograph constantly thrusts on us what is insignificant or irrelevant, and neglects the most important values. The highest praise we can give it is to have approached the excellence of painting or sculpture in one of two ways. Either, by chance or skill, it reproduces the essential characteristic, the dominating mood, with something of the artist's divination. Or else by an emphasis of light on contours it can suggest the characteristic structure and modelling which fascinate us in a portrait bust. More often it fails of either effect. Dostoevsky suggests a reason for that, through the mouth of one of his characters :—

‘ Observe,’ he said ; ‘ photographs very rarely

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turn out good likenesses, and that one can easily understand ; the originals, that is all of us, are very rarely like ourselves. Only on rare occasions does a man's face express his leading quality, his most characteristic thought. The artist studies the face and divines its characteristic meaning, though at the actual moment when he is painting, it may not be in the face at all. Photography takes a man as he is, and it is extremely possible that at moments Napoleon would have turned out stupid, and Bismarck tender.'

As it is the portrait-painter who, if any one, has to carry out Leonardo's precept and represent 'man and the intention of his soul,' it seems natural to credit him with interest and competence in matters lying outside the region of art. We do not expect the landscape-painter to be a geologist, but we presume that the painter of portraits will know something about men. And so it is easy to go further and say that portraiture demands a special kind of knowledge—psychological insight—which is not required by other forms of art. But here one may easily fall into a confusion, for while the painter's subject is the intention of the soul, it is equally true that, as

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Leonardo himself goes on to say, he has to represent it ' by the attitude and movements of the limbs,' and he only paints it if he can find it there. So much so that a mass of ascertained data about the habits and interests of his subject may actually embarrass the artist when he is face to face with the sitter. A portrait is neither a biography nor criticism ; it is an impression or intuition, and all the information it gives is subordinate to that. It may be true, and in the same measure surprising, just because the artist has pierced below all the known level of action and interest in his subject to an unguessed, persistent quality of the disposition underneath. But this will have probably come about through a visual suggestion. Therefore while granting that a man will only paint portraits if he is interested in other people, and that all the experience he may get in that way will be of use to him, we need not go so far as to say that portraiture requires an absolutely special kind of knowledge, or that the subject, in consequence, has an unique importance there.

Dutch painting is certainly one of those moments in art when the material seems to

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make a dominating claim. It has been suggested above that the reason why the subject apparently counts for so much there is not only because the scenes depicted are familiar and homely, but because the painters are so naively content with them. The Dutch school stand in a relation to their material rather like that of Balzac to his. Like him they have thrown open the doors of their art to take in the riches of the actual life about them—the landscape and architecture of their country, its ‘interiors’ high and low, with every suggestion of the intercourse carried on within them, from the most matter-of-fact details to a quiet sumptuousness. They no longer treat these things, like the Italian masters, as accessories, but make them frankly the substance of their art. And they paint them so freely because they are themselves full of the genial temper of the hour ; they enjoy its comfortable life, and share in the well-being, self-reliance, and leisure—leisure to commemorate all that has suddenly blossomed round them. So it goes without saying that they know their subject well enough. The only flaw we can find in them is that they have not had time to take its measure ;

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to estimate the relative importance of the things they see. For that reason their work often appears to be all 'subject,' wonderful craftsmen as they are.

Balzac had the same gusto, the same immersion in his material, without the saving modesty of the Dutch masters. On his work and on their work as a whole the wide admission of the actual had a similar effect, with the difference that Balzac is more boring when he fails, and the Dutch painters more trivial when they do. The moral of both cases seems to be that if realism is to keep the true values of things it needs a mixture of passion and detachment. Passion, to track the secret of surrounding existences, prompted by the joy in existence from which it springs ; detachment from any special strain of feeling that would prejudice the view. Where this disinterested passion flags we feel the values are not wholly true. The Dutch painters had their bias or *idolon* in the worship of comfort, and Balzac had his in the worship of money and his intense social feeling. When we condemn their failures it is because this complacency has betrayed them into materialism ; when we admire their

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successes we feel it has contributed to the general richness of the effect, and we cannot wish it away. But in both cases we have a suspicion that the 'subject' has got a little more than it deserves.

## CHAPTER VI

### THE FALLACY OF NATURALISM

Zola and the Theory of Naturalism—Influence of Taine—Accumulation of Fact—Deterministic Calculus—Psychological Crudity—Position of Maupassant—Social Preoccupations of the Naturalists—Science and Impressionism—Manet and Degas as true Realists.

SOMETHING has been already said in passing about the naturalistic fallacy. The shortest account that can be given of it would be to say that it confuses art with science. To explain more fully how it does so may mean reviving a forgotten controversy, and possibly slaying the slain, but it will set in a clearer light than anything else can the difference between naturalism<sup>1</sup> and realism, and it may

<sup>1</sup> Almost as many different senses have been given to naturalism as to realism, so that a word is necessary to explain, at least, what it does *not* mean here. In literature it has been applied to George Eliot and other English writers by foreign critics like Brunetière and Brandes; still earlier, in the *grand siècle*, Boileau preached naturalism as the imitation of what was universally true, and Molière showed how this could be done in practice. Nowadays art critics sometimes use the word as an



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help to define the boundaries between science and art.

The naturalistic mistake was not limited to the nineteenth century. Already at Florence in the fifteenth century there were painters like Uccello who, in spite of their charm or excellence, leave on us the common impression that they are constantly trying to solve scientific problems under the guise of art. Mr. Berenson's account of the matter is that art was then not only the fashionable profession but the only one, outside practical affairs, for men of talent, and so minds which were really inventive or speculative were drawn towards painting. How remote this supremacy of art over science seems to us now ! For in the nineteenth century the tables were

almost exact equivalent of what I have called realism. Philosophically, Mr. Moore gave a fresh meaning to the word in his *Principia Ethica*. It is not in any of these senses that the word is used here. What it usually means, in discussions about philosophy and science, is the view that the universe is a system of strictly mechanical or physical processes. It is in this sense, or one directly derived from it, that the word has been applied to the school of literature which holds that art should be governed by scientific method, because its human subject-matter can be measured and analysed in just the same way as the materials of the physical sciences. In this chapter and throughout the book it is this use of the word and its consequences that I have had in mind.

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turned, and physical science became the career which promised most ; while in France, at least, it was fashionable to give a scientific form to art, and to make the same claims for it which were made for science. Flaubert, as we have seen, was influenced by the change, and even Sainte-Beuve is found saying that what he really relies on is his training as a student of medicine. Again there was a naturalistic art, only instead of arising, as at Florence, out of the perversion of a gift, it was caused by a mental confusion. Scientific men were no longer obliged to become artists, but artists thought it their duty to be scientific. We should not think of describing Zola, for instance, as a man of science *manqué* ; he has been more truly called a desperate romantic. Yet he more than any one was impelled by the spirit of the age to give his work a scientific shape, and his description of the method in the *Roman Expérimental* is the simplest way of grasping the doctrine with all its implications.

Zola's essay on the experimental novel is one of the most interesting things that he wrote, but it owes a great deal of its interest to the

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fact that it is an adaptation of a still more remarkable piece of writing, Claude Bernard's *Introduction to the Study of Experimental Medicine*. Claude Bernard's classic has been, and is still, a source of inspiration to many French writers whose work has nothing to do with medicine or science, but it never received a handsomer compliment than when Zola took it over with both hands. Not that he makes any secret of the proceeding. He says that the solution of the whole matter is to be found in Bernard, and what he himself will offer is simply a compilation of texts.

‘For I count, at every point, on entrenching myself behind Claude Bernard. As a rule, it will be enough for me to substitute the word “novelist” for the word “doctor” in order to make my meaning clear and give it the precision of scientific truth.’<sup>1</sup>

Bernard's object was to transform medicine, as far as possible, from an art into a science. The sentence last quoted shows how far Zola was prepared to go in doing the same thing with the novel. Not only is the art of the novelist

<sup>1</sup> Zola, *Roman Expérimental*, p. 2.

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to be like science ; it is apparently, so far as it can, to *be* science. Zola, with his readiness to jump in any promising direction, takes a suggestive analogy for literal fact. Bernard had begun by distinguishing observation from experiment : an experiment is a kind of *observation provoquée*, a case where the investigator can vary the phenomena so that they will result in a fresh observation. Just so, Zola says, the novelist is in exactly the same position ; he begins by observing the life before him, but as he is not a mere reporter he can modify and rearrange the facts, and in doing so he performs an 'experiment,' which is the substance of his novel. Within its limits this is a capital analogy, of which Zola was entitled to make use. The novelist does experiment with his situations and characters, and the result of his imagining is a fresh experience. But what Zola forgets, as a French critic<sup>1</sup> has pointed out, is that the experiment is not performed in a laboratory or a hospital, but in the writer's head. It is controlled by nothing except a sense of probability in the novelist and his readers, and it proves nothing

<sup>1</sup> M. Lanson

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in any form that science would accept. Not only so, but the writer, as an artist, does not want to prove anything. The only design he has upon the reader is to get him to share in an experience. When Zola insists that 'The problem is to know . . . the goal is knowledge, scientific knowledge of man in his individual and social action,' he is tracing the programme which belongs to psychology and sociology, not to the novel or any form of art. What we ask for is a new experience, imaginative in form and appealing to our imaginative reason. It may make us wiser in knowledge of the world, and on analysing how it does so we may find that some of the materials have been borrowed from science, but this is only incidental to the artist's real aim, which is to make us share in his reading of some aspect of life. Zola's mistake seems so plain that there would be no object in dwelling on it were it not to show how physical science, not so very long ago, confused and overshadowed art.

The same obsession dominated a greater mind than Zola's, by which Zola, indeed, was deeply affected—the mind of Taine. Though gifted

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with a keener artistic sensibility than Zola, Taine none the less laid down the foundations of naturalism with a resoluteness which fatally impressed his disciple. Taine's famous theory of 'the race, the milieu, and the moment' is a superb instance of those doctrines which explain everything except the one fact that we want explained, and by their failure cast a doubt on the relevance of the whole fabric. He believed that the amassing of 'quite small significant facts' was the substance of all science and the way in which works of art could be interpreted. On Zola, the Goncourts, Daudet and their successors the effect of this side of his doctrine was great. It is the source of all that accumulation of detail which is the most wearisome, if not the most repulsive, feature in the literature of naturalism. If only Taine's caution of 'significance' had been attended to, all might have been well. But the bent of his theory, proposing as it did to give the whole environment of the individual, was to show that there was no fact one could safely neglect. And we know, to our cost, how Zola omitted to neglect them. It is this orgy of detail which gives, as one reads

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his books, that feeling of encountering a series of small hard blocks of matter which our minds strive vainly to digest. We do not have to go to Zola's failures or his immaturities to find it—to the *Fortune des Rougon*, for instance, where a parenthesis of one hundred and forty-three pages on the town of Plassans and the origin of the Rougon-Macquarts completely eclipses Balzac's wildest efforts in the same direction. It is the reef on which his best novels are shipwrecked ; which makes the *Débâcle* fail of its effect, because it has all the laboriousness of a long addition sum, and continually pulls us up in *L'Assommoir* with a fatiguing exposition of one Parisian *métier* after another.

Excess of detail, *le trivialisme*, as Guyau called it, is ruinous to artistic effect, because the work of art becomes clogged and lifeless. But there was another way in which the naturalists, still under the dominion of their scientific theory, claimed to seize upon reality and lay bare its workings. This was the belief that all human conduct was a mechanism which could be analysed and accounted for with the same precision as the objects of the sciences. It was

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still an ideal, this certainty, but an ideal which would be attained one day. 'We have got experimental chemistry and physics: we shall have experimental physiology, later still we shall have the experimental novel. One and the same determinism regulates the stone on the highroad and the brain of man.' Zola, following his scientific mentor, is careful to say that determinism only shows us how things happen, it does not show us *why*. It is confined to the conditions of existence, and proximate causes of things. One need not be a Bergsonian or an idealist to feel that here again, if Zola could carry out his dream, he would be drawing literature further away from the living reality, further still from the æsthetic whole of art, towards the laboratories and dissecting-rooms of science. For the characteristic of human living is precisely the sense of freedom to will; and even if the completeness of our freedom is only an illusion, to explain away this action upon the unmade and unforeseen is like removing the mainspring of vitality.

Zola urged that his determinism, analysing proximate causes and conditions, was immeasur-



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ably superior to fatalism, with its incumbence of a shadowy Destiny. From the artistic point of view it may be doubted whether this is actually so. If it is a question of realistic effect, the more vivid impression is surely made by an art like Thomas Hardy's, which, without taking the mechanism to pieces, suggests man's insurgence against a force that works in him and in the universe, eluding his perfect understanding and control. Hopes and fears, uncertainty and freshness, misgiving and rebellion, are still the notes of life, and as long as they are so art must reflect them. If a deterministic science were ever perfected, and all the consequences of our acts laid open to prediction, an analysis far closer and finer than Zola's might be the only tolerated type. At present, art and nature instinctively reject it. The fate of Tolstoy's attempt to apply the deterministic method in *War and Peace* is interesting. In the historical passages, true to his theory that history should emphasise man's dependence on laws, he uses it ruthlessly, with the result that Napoleon appears not only a more trivial person than we are accustomed to find him, but more insignificant than he can possibly

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have been. This does not offend Tolstoy's sense of art, because his malicious realism actually gives freshness to Napoleon's rather conventionalised figure. But in working out his imaginary characters, where nothing is familiar to us and the impression of reality has to be created from the start, he shows himself too great an artist to be ridden by his theory, and Natasha, Pierre, and the rest appear as delicious incarnations of vitality and freedom.

So far we have been considering the ways in which naturalism fails to satisfy the sense of art. It failed just as much to attain its own ideal of impartial science. Here again it was Taine's influence which led Zola and his friends astray. Taine's view of the way in which man acts and knows was based on the psychology of the eighteenth century ; he thought that all knowledge is a faded product of the senses, and the only function of the mind is to abstract and compare. The note of Taine's theory is distrust of reason, and it was pretty certain that any one who took it over with ingenuous belief would underrate the rational and originative side of human nature. If Zola had had a true psycho-

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logical gift, and had not been in fierce reaction against the excesses of the idealists, his private experience might have corrected the consequences of Taine's doctrine. As it was, he accepted them joyfully ; they simplified at one stroke what would have been his most complicated problem—the inner life of his characters. For Zola there is practically no inner life ; there is external behaviour, and what lies behind that is reduced to physiological terms. The example of Balzac, with his bent towards pessimism and his strength in depicting manners and vice, had also a rather tiresome influence. The novel became pathological, and pathological in the most uninteresting department—the brutality and grossness of animal natures. Zola got his proportions wrong, and he can hardly be said to have had any values. The curious trick, often noticed, by which he is not content to describe one person doing anything, but must give you people in couples and even in tens and hundreds, springs from his conscious failure with the individual and his fondness for crowds and success in massing them. But it is not by duplicating persons or by reducing them to their least common denominator that

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you can be sure of giving them a heightened reality. One instance is typical of the way in which Zola's view of human nature betrayed his art. There are two outstanding novels about the Franco-German War—Zola's *Débâcle* and the *Désastre* of Paul and Victor Margueritte. Both tell the harrowing tale of incompetence, tragedy, and suffering. Zola takes it at its lowest, and presents a canvas mainly occupied with the almost physical ruminations of the peasant soldier. The Marguerittes began from the other end, and showed ruin spreading from the paralysis of the General Staff. On Zola's or Tolstoy's theory of the relation of thoughts to acts, this would be removing us further from the action. But the result is to give—what a picture of mainly material ruin like *La Débâcle* cannot give—the whole working of the tragedy; not only a statement of its origin but a feeling that we grasp its essence and are swept from the first down the midstream of fatality.

Maupassant, who is sometimes referred to as the greatest master of naturalism, is not really characteristic of it, because he had no preconceptions. A mind more absolutely indifferent to

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theory is not to be imagined. 'Make something fine, in the form that suits you best, according to your temperament,' is one of the few maxims he uttered, and it reveals decidedly an artist, not a writer distracted by bias in his aims. The absence of bias qualified him to be a great realist, and he had more than that : a keen and powerful observation, which Flaubert had developed, and a style that was strong, clear, and quiet, like his own ideal of French prose. What is it, then, which links him with the naturalists and hinders him from reaching the very summit of realistic art ? The answer must be found in his temperament and the limitations of his mind. He was, as a person, not unlike the typical man of the naturalistic psychology ; more finely developed, but in essence the same ; instinctive, masterful, and restless, bent on swift satisfactions and rejoicing in his physical prowess. He saw other men in his own image, and among the Norman peasants and the egoistic types of Paris it served him well. Yet, greatly as he succeeded, he is not supreme among realists because his view of humanity was too limited to do justice to life all round. It is nature, not theory, that holds him

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back and gives him a position midway between the realists and the naturalists. His sense of humour and his sense of art saved him from bondage to a false science. If his strength had not broken, these qualities might have carried him on to a larger and more interesting view of human nature ; it was emerging already in *Notre Cœur*, where the psychology is finer and he is at his ease among more reflective types.

While Maupassant was unprompted by theory he was also perfectly innocent of any purpose foreign to art. This unsophisticated attitude contrasts sharply with the social and ethical preoccupations of Zola and the Goncourts. In their hands the novel made those final pretensions which, having once identified itself with applied science, it was perhaps bound to make. As urged by Zola they are very large. The motto of medicine and the experimental sciences was ' Master life so as to dissect it ' ; why should not the novelist do the same ? Yes, he says, our goal is the same as theirs ; we too desire to make ourselves the masters of phenomena so that we can control them, and there lies our practical usefulness and our high morality.

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‘ So it is practical sociology that we are engaged on, and our labours aid the political and economic sciences. There is no work, I repeat, more noble or of wider application. To be masters of good and evil, to regulate life and society, to solve at last all the problems of socialism, above all, to put justice on a firm foundation by solving through experiment the questions of criminality, does not that make us the most useful and most moral workers in the human task ? ’ <sup>1</sup>

This is noble, overpowering even, but it has passed far away from the simple pleasures of art. It suggests a remark of Flaubert’s, who was extremely generous to Zola about his creative work :—‘ Zola’s aplomb in matters of criticism is only to be explained by his inconceivable ignorance.’ Can he ever have thought as he wrote, the man who claims without a tremor the whole apparatus of ethics, economics, sociology, and criminology as the substance of the novel ? It is hidden from him that if the novel actually becomes one or other of these things, it will cease to be a novel. But one sees the logic of the fatal process ; first literature becomes science,

<sup>1</sup> Zola, *Le Roman Expérimental*, p. 24.

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then the science is applied to human purposes, lastly it is to regulate society. The belief was genuine in Zola ; while he is still ranging his scientific instruments in order a desired conclusion strikes him, kindles his romantic impulse, and assumes direction of his work.

Even the Goncourts, those amateurs of strangeness in sensation and the exquisite in language, own to the same kind of ambition, though with them it takes a form that is rather less didactic. Their *Germinie Lacerteux* was more than a novel ; it was what the French call a *réquisitoire*. Its preface is a manifesto, and strikes, as Zola does, the social note :—

‘ Now that the novel is widening and growing, that it is beginning to be the great serious, passionate, living form of literary study and social inquiry, that it is becoming, through psychological analysis and research, our contemporary moral history, now that it has laid upon itself the methods and duties of science, it may claim scientific liberties and rights. Let it seek art and truth ; let it show the wretchedness which it is good that happy Parisians should not forget : let it reveal to the world of society what



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sisters of mercy are brave enough to see, what queens of old made their children see, eye to eye—the human suffering, present and vivid, which teaches charity. Let the novel have that religion which the last century called by a wide vast name, Humanity ; this consciousness will be enough, for its right lies there.'

This is more human, more amiable, than Zola's scientific parade, but it shows the same desire to seek an object for the novel outside art. And it points to what were, as a matter of fact, the notes of this particular book—its ' clinical ' interest and the prevalence of the pathetic fallacy. *Germinie Lacerteux* is an organised assault on our compassion, and it fails to move us just because we feel that the facts have not been seen calmly. More usual with the Goncourts than this appeal to feeling is their pathological obsession—the taste for morbid cases, perversions, and the bizarre. Yet they wrote *Renée Mauperin*, which is clear and strong, and survives amid French naturalism like a lonely monument to show that the real is not necessarily the same as the distorted or the dull.

Art cannot long remain entangled in an influ-

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ence which contradicts it. It was a moment of exaggerated belief in the promises of science which gave birth to naturalism, and when that enthusiasm died down literature was ready to take an independent course again. Not that things could be as if naturalism had never been. But though its incubus was heavy, it had less realistic influence on the novel than Balzac, who was content to regard science as an inspiration instead of taking it over as a method. At one point after another naturalism stands opposed to realism. It professes to discover laws, and treats events as cases instead of taking pleasure in their individuality ; it prefers the detail which smothers to the detail which illuminates ; and it is committed in advance to a theory of human nature which cannot account for more than half the facts. In each of these ways it not only fails to render life vividly but discards the very form of art.

There is an obvious kinship between the *Naturalistes* and the Impressionist painters ; neither one school nor the other could have developed in any but a scientific age. Yet there are differences between them at least as striking

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as their likeness. Claude Monet and the earlier masters, at least, were free from the naturalistic fallacy—the confusion between science and art ; it begins only with the second generation of the Impressionists, with Seurat and Signac, whose researches have an air like Zola's. Monet, we may presume, simply painted what interested him most in the things he saw. The prevailing interest became a passion, and gave birth to a process which had scientific method and precision; but he painted beauty, though it was a beauty that obeyed new laws. While naturalism is condemned to be the most prosaic of all methods, there is an evident poetry in impressionism. Instead of fitting together hard blocks of detail, like Zola, it chose for the centre of interest what is the most subtle medium of unity in any scene : the light or atmosphere which is the condition of our seeing anything, and bathes and transfigures all we see. This led in practice to an analytic process, the division of tones ; but all the same the most vivid and elusive element in nature remained the real subject of the painter.

Impressionism is realism, so far as it rebelled against all academic models and standards, and

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made straight for life and the open air. But it tried to paint the condition of our seeing, rather than the things we see. Certainly light 'lives itself and makes us live,' but we see it by deliberate abstraction rather than in the direct act of vision. It may be said, no doubt, that the Impressionists gave us new eyes, and that this is exactly what great painters can do for us ; none the less, the individual existences which we know through form were of secondary importance to them. They began with light and made colour entirely dependent on it, while form was subsidiary to both. This is why their art perplexes us ; we feel dimly that it is based on a false logic of visibility. It invites us to take the atmospheric or organic conditions of sight for sight itself. And eventually, when impressionism has set us thinking, it draws us back to a philosophy of mere appearances—of colour-spots or tones entirely severed from their spatial characteristics. Yet it is this setting in space which not only makes them what they are but enables us to see them.

It is because the impressionists do turn our thoughts to science or philosophy that we shrewdly feel they have a bias in theory and are

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not simply engaged in making vivid the reality they saw. There is unconscious thinking as much as a conscious pursuit of principles, and by their ruling preoccupation the French impressionists recall the Florentine naturalists, though it was not so much a problem of drawing they tried to work out as a problem of nature. Their method led them into the region of science, even if it did not start there. For this reason they are much less distinctively realistic than Manet or Degas. Manet, treating the things he saw with a new mastery of colour, yet seeing them with a candour and impartiality that refused to be fettered by a single aspect ; Degas, divining in his moving figures the secrets of character and temperament—these are the true analogues of Flaubert and Ibsen. Manet's painting is, indeed, as near an equivalent as may be found in another art to Flaubert's 'plastic realism,' while Degas recalls Ibsen's strange blend of mysticism, energy and disenchantment.

## CHAPTER VII

### THE PRESENT SITUATION

The 'Georgian' Writers — Artistic Satisfactions — The Question of Form—The Sense of Vitality—Meaning of Vitality—Hostility to Theories—Hope and Destructiveness — Entanglement with Life — The Quest of Freedom — Mingled Elements in the New Writers—The Nature of their Realism.

LOOKING at a succession of types, adopting some and discarding others, we have tried to fill out the notion of realism as a form of art which represents the actual world in such a way as to give a heightened sense of it ; an impersonal art, subduing idiosyncrasy to the theme it works on, and yet having, when it is successful, that individual accent by which great art is known. The temptation now becomes irresistible to apply this criticism to some fairly defined phrase of contemporary art. To apply it to painting would be almost useless, because the general direction of contemporary painting is too uncertain ; all we can say with assurance

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is that it is still in strong reaction against the 'trivialism' or pseudo-realism of nearly half a century of Academy art. Rich in intellectual curiosity, and susceptible to movements of thought, it tends towards the abstract, as in Cubism and its offshoots, or the instinctive, as in Futurism. 'Representation' is out of fashion, or if admitted is subordinate, as a rule, to the decorative impulse. But in literature, and particularly with regard to the poets and novelists who have been christened 'Georgian,' our criterion can be applied more profitably. Here is a form of representation which has not thrown off its realistic elements, which perhaps has even developed a newer realism. But its seas, as yet, are hardly charted; the first thing we have to do is to try to discover the main currents.

One way of understanding artists is through the ease or difficulty of their satisfactions. Keats, for instance, starting with the natural wealth of an extraordinarily perceptive temperament, is content at first with trying to write down the riches of sensation in 'a line of golden tone.' Then, as his will to be a supreme artist

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affirms itself, he sees that the way lies, in his own words, through application, study, and thought. But all through his short life, however he may declare from time to time that there are certain experiences of which he would do well to have knowledge, he remains comparatively indifferent or acquiescent to the *matter* of his experience, and so do we. It is towards perfection of form that he is struggling, and by this achieved perfection that he survives. Wordsworth, on the other hand, appears greatly occupied at first with the question of poetic diction, and the way in which this is to be handled seems the central motive of many of his earlier poems. Then his inward strength of mind asserts itself, and the real interest of his work is seen to be that it shows us how, in fortunate moments, 'we see into the life of things.' The diction or expression is left, comparatively speaking, to shift for itself ; it will be noble or trivial, not so much by deliberate workmanship, as according to the degree in which the penetrative mood of inspiration lasts. And there are tracts of Wordsworth which we do not care to read because he has satisfied himself too easily with



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the belief that an inspiration was there when it was not.

Now from this point of view it does not seem hard to say where the new writers are easily satisfied, and where, through the demands of a more exacting interest, they are not. The whole problem of form and execution they seem to take very much as it comes. They give the impression that they are easily contented as regards this, and that the reason is because their chief preoccupation is elsewhere. Defect of form does not exclude, of course, an earnest search for it and subsequent attainment, the difficulty of the enterprise being measured by the complication of what has to be expressed. But the thoughts of some of these writers reveal themselves so ingenuously as to suggest that the problem hardly troubles them. Mr. Gilbert Cannan does not mind telling us that he is of such a temper and vision that if he aims his pen at a man he is as likely as not to hit his grandfather; and characteristically this confession is made in the preface to *Round the Corner*, which is perhaps the most vulnerable of his novels in form and the strongest and

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most original in other qualities. Readers of the two volumes of *Georgian Poetry* have been struck not only by the beauty flowering here and there, but by the violence and want of finish in the handling. What points hardly less suggestively to an incuriousness of form is the steady recurrence of the writers to well-worn narrative metres—heroics, octosyllables, and a blank verse which is near to prose—a habit which suggests that the matter to be conveyed in the poems has shaped itself independently of the form which conveys it. The strength of these poets does not lie in imaginative execution ; in the felicity of word and cadence which makes it impossible for us to sever the contents from the completed poem. Nor, when the chief interest is in the thought—and there is much thinking in these poems—has it always been so imaginatively fused that we take it unquestioningly at its poetic value. There is more sense of form in the plays and dramatic poems ; a point not to be forgotten by any one who is tempted to dismiss the Georgian poets as *without* form, and one which will certainly be important in deciding where their chief interest really lies.

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The question of form cannot be separated from that of imagination ; an indifference to some kinds of form means a poverty in the corresponding type of imagination. The connection is one which reaches far back, and yet we must beware of making it indiscriminating. Because the Georgians, for instance, have a tendency to express themselves in prosaic or narrative forms, we shall not conclude that they are not imaginative, but that their imagination is of a particular type or is working in a particular way. Keats and Morris should have dispelled the idea that the use of this form is the inevitable sign of a prosaic mind. But its use means something ; what are we to suppose that it means here ? Youth has often used it just because it is such an easy channel to express thoughts or ambitions, or simply to note down impressions as they pass. With the Georgians its employment seems more deliberate, more significant of some prevailing mood of interest. It is a clue which helps us to the meaning of their other work, and seems always to lead us back to the same centre. We cannot say of these poets anything less—and if it is simply a question

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of width we could hardly say anything more—than that they are supremely interested in the facts of life and living. This interest starts, as it should, from the universal basis. It can communicate the magic of sensation, as Rupert Brooke has done ; or, as Mr. Davies does so delightfully, the simplest perceptions :—

‘A rainbow and a cuckoo, Lord,  
How rich and great the times are now !  
Know, all ye sheep  
And cows, that keep  
On staring that I stand so long  
In grass that’s wet from heavy rain—  
A rainbow and a cuckoo’s song  
May never come together again ;  
May never come  
This side the tomb.’

So too the escaped convict in Mr. Gibson’s ‘Gorse,’ running for life and liberty over the moor, drops in an ecstasy amidst the heady radiance of the yellow furze glittering round him. But these writers do not respond only to the physical experiences which are the common joy of all poets of nature. They are in quest of what is vital and spontaneous in humanity

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as much as in nature ; and so Mr. Compton Mackenzie writes the biography of youth's emotions, and Mr. Masefield's search for the untrammelled leads him to the violent. Life has an abundance which makes mere good and evil seem small ; all thought and action must draw first from this fountain. The person who is most alive is the person who counts most. In Mr. Gordon Bottomley's play, *King Lear's Wife*, the figure of Goneril dominates everything not so much by deliberate will or purpose as by instinctive strength :—

‘You pulse and glow : you are too vital ; your presence  
hurts . . .

Freshness of hill-swards, wind and trodden ling,  
I should have known that Goneril stands here.’

While the presence of vitality is the source of all power and delight, its absence is irreparable, a thing to mourn over. No length of days spent in successful routine or mechanical goodness can compensate for it. This is the lesson enforced in the play which is, as it were, the pendant to Mr. Gordon Bottomley's, closing the second volume of *Georgian Poetry*, as his begins it. It is not to be supposed

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that the persons in a poem, least of all a dramatic poem, are there to utter the beliefs of the writer. But they are a characterisation of thoughts and feelings that have passed through his mind ; whether they stand for more will depend on the kind of emphasis he gives them, and on the support they get from the general atmosphere of the work considered. In this play of Mr. Lascelles Abercrombie's, *The End of the World*, even a huddled, unwilling figure like Farmer Huff's is made suddenly expressive, and through the outcry of his stunted, snarling nature he seems to speak the whole negative feeling of the piece :—

‘ A caterpillar munching a cabbage heart,  
Always drudging further and further from  
The sounds and lights of the world, never abroad  
Nor flying free in warmth and air sweet-smelling ;  
A crawling caterpillar, eating his life  
In a deaf dark—that's my gain of goodness !  
And it's too late to hatch out now !—  
I can but fancy what I might have been ;  
I scarce know how to sin !—But I believe  
A long while back I did come near to it.’

Despairingly he muses, longs to be able to look back on ‘ one manful hour of romping,’ and finds

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his respectable past so dead and rotten that the mere look of decency is enough to sour anything for him. He cannot take his wife back from her seducer, just because she *is* his wife. 'What's the good of a woman whom I've married?' But this thirst for life at any price does not cover the whole story. For just at this moment Shale, who took Huff's wife—Shale, who 'had a stirring sense of what he is'—comes in to remind us that a mere wallowing in the shows of life leaves a man no less bankrupt. Faced by the general crash bursting on the world, he shows himself every bit as enslaved as Huff; his one idea is to make peace with appearances by getting the stolen goods off his hands. It seems, then, that a blind jump into life or a succession of thrills are not what these writers understand by vitality. The sense of life has to be made good in some way; it must carry a man on to some position where he is not so much its plaything as its master.

And here we are reminded of what was said before about the ease or difficulty of satisfactions. This absorbing problem of life is decidedly a

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matter in which the new writers are not easily satisfied. For if they refuse to rest in mere sensation or mere emotion, they reject no less emphatically any code which claims to fix the values of things beforehand, any theory which would pronounce upon them from secure aloofness. Solutions like these are untrue to the very spirit of life ; for living is a process or movement which must provide, in some sense, its own solution. The conventions and dogmas are inevitably so many restrictions imposed on the free spirit of life, which prevent it from bringing its fruits to perfection because they are so inadequate to its rich capacity. Here, for instance, is a comment from another novel of Mr. Cannan's :—

‘ Rigid theory and fixed conceptions actually hurt him ; they were detached, dead, like windfall fruit rotting on the ground, and everywhere, in books, in newspapers, in public speeches he saw them gathered up and stored, because it was too much trouble to take the ripe fruit from the tree, or to wait for the hanging fruit to ripen, or because (he thought) men walk with their eyes to the ground, even as he had done, and



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see nothing of the beauty above and around them.' <sup>1</sup>

Theory and convention, from this point of view, are simply a conspiracy against the art of living. They do more than cramp it, they contradict it ; for they are devices invented by people, themselves largely moribund, to avoid the responsibility of meeting life. Rigid theory cabins your thoughts ; but it has an equivalent in the ethical sphere, which is numbing prudence. Of this worldly virtue Mr. Abercrombie writes in *The Soul of St. Thomas* :—

‘Prudence, prudence is the deadly sin,  
And one that groweth deep into a life,  
With hardening roots that clutch about the breast.  
For this refuses faith in the unknown powers  
Within man’s nature ; shrewdly bringeth all  
Their inspiration of strange eagerness  
To a judgment bought by safe experience ;  
Narrows desire into the scope of thought,  
But it is written in the heart of man,  
Thou shalt no larger be than thy desire.  
Thou must not therefore stoop thy spirit’s sight  
To pore only within the candle-gleam  
Of conscious wit and reasonable brain.’

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<sup>1</sup> *Old Mole*, p. 181.

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Well, it may be said, there is nothing very new in this ; have not youth and young art always antagonised theory and prudence ? Doubtless they have ; but what seems new here is the refusal to sketch an easy satisfaction. With the Shelleys and Hugos of the past the denunciation of a purblind age has generally been fortified by a boundless belief in some Utopia or creed that would heal all. With our authors nothing is asserted except the claim, and indeed the necessity, for every one to work out his salvation. It would seem that one of the main impulses which led them to write was a strong—sometimes a violent—reaction. Whatever the new life is to be, it must first shake itself free of the litter left behind by the last age. The reaction against what we conveniently call Victorianism may show itself in many ways, but one of them is certainly a distrust of ideals which have been cheaply raised on a practical basis of materialism. Mr. E. M. Forster put as a motto on the title-page of his *Howard's End* the words 'Only connect.' This maxim is intended as a protest against the habit of constructing ideals at the expense of other people, and, generally speaking,

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of using these nostrums as blinkers to shut off the view not only of others, but of ourselves. The reaction will be an attempt to be consistent all through, even if this means thinking out things from the bottom. The last thing that we should expect to find would be a swift and easy solution. Much that has been taken for granted the Georgian writers insist on thinking over again, feeling over again ; for before you can build anything your own experience must be realised and sifted. This is quite enough to account for their mingled air of hope and destructiveness, and not less for the predominance in their work of contents over form.

For what the twentieth century has on its hands, as matter for representation, is a task of great dimensions. Compared with it Balzac's heroic effort to give 'everything' may seem an insignificance and a delusion. The men of his time were still trying to wipe out what they regarded as the parenthesis of the Revolution, and the nineteenth century was only starting on the race for wealth and the intellectual experiments and misgivings between which it was to be distracted. The writers of to-day survey

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the *débris*, and begin with more chastened feelings than were possible for the Romantics of a century ago. The last age having been in many respects a muddle, one of the first things they do is to shake themselves and ask if they are really there, and what does it mean to be alive. If this was the feeling before the war, we may imagine how the war itself will deepen it. They start from the heart of experience, and all its joys and revolts and perplexities have to be lived through again before they can concentrate very calmly on the world around. That world itself is immensely various and chaotic, and has the air of being even more perplexed than they are. It is not an easy task, therefore, to fit the inner to the outer, and to present this as a rounded whole in art. At least it may be said that literature has buckled to the problem, unlike painting, which, after a still sharper reaction, seems to be shrugging its shoulders in despair.

The attempt to deal with what is in many ways a novel experience may lead to a new expressive form. What is already being done is new in this way, that it gives a keen sense of a living experience which is actually being represented

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from within. The Georgian writers share to the full that feeling of being inside the stream of time, which makes and unmakes both facts and consciousness—the feeling which in another sphere has made the success of Bergson's philosophy. The passages quoted above from Mr. Cannan about rigid theory, and Mr. Abercrombie about 'the candle-gleam of conscious wit,' directly illustrate this frame of mind. No doubt it is open to the risk of confusing art with life, just as Bergson's theory has confused thinking with living. It is also not easy to see how writers who are so entangled in life can ever reach a position of detachment where their perplexities are answered. But then this deep entanglement in life may turn out to be the very secret of the new art. It is the natural temper for those who are reacting against the unreal, and the only pledge that their own constructions will not be shaky. *Æsthetically*, it is a bold stroke for fuller realisation or expression. It might be the beginning of an art which will represent the movement of life more truly than has yet been done in the expansive sequence of the novel or the rhythm of poetry.

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But can a great art be expected from writers who are so deeply implicated in the perplexities of living ? Are they not bound to be enslaved by the tyranny of things which happen, just *because* they happen, and to find themselves powerless to wring from life what we most want, namely, meanings and values ? This was the prospect which filled Henry James with dismay when he was considering the new novel. It was the charge brought by the supreme master of meaning against writers who find living too intricate an affair at present to provide one. For the moment it might be enough to counter this charge with a plea for patience ; but what should prove the saving grace of the new writers is their belief in freedom. For those in whom freedom is the ruling motive will not be content till they have made themselves by some means masters of life. It would be easy to find evidence for this governing belief in freedom. Here is an outspoken declaration by Mr. Cannan :—

‘ Only a man’s own mind can make him a slave, and every healthy human being from first to last of conscious life struggles for the freedom of his own mind. We set about it often in

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strange ways and make dreadful muddles, but the fight itself renders life enjoyable, even if the aim be never attained. Freedom, of course, like everything else, is subject to the limitations of this existence.' <sup>1</sup>

It is subject to these limitations, and yet it calls for satisfaction here or nowhere. 'You postpone freedom,' cries one of his characters, 'because to you the crust of slavery seems impenetrable. I want freedom for that essence in myself here and now. It is the fiercest instinct in me, stronger than hunger, stronger than reproduction, which are only by the way. What I find in myself I believe to exist in all other men.' <sup>2</sup>

Serge, the speaker, is the only person in this novel who has shaken himself free, but Mr. Folyat the hero, 'bachelor of divinity and father of a large family,' while obeying all the conventions, painfully arrives at the same point in the end. With a strong, soulless, impersonal world against you, it is tempting to take the easiest material symbol and embody freedom in

<sup>1</sup> *Round the Corner*. Preface.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 293.

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the types that are outside class or convention. Hence the attraction to waifs, beggars, circuses, dancers—Bohemian figures always flitting through these novels and poems. The choice has become something of a pose, but it means something ; it is not mere fancy dress and masquerading. Indeed, one might say it needs no justification beyond the example of Mr. Davies. Against that extraordinary background of colour in his Autobiography—a tramp-world so appropriate that one can only borrow Voltaire's remark and say that if it had not existed it would be necessary to invent it—he emerges as the freest and most gentle soul imaginable ; so that here the unsocial life seems the best road to simple joy and self-possession. Man must be allowed to ' make side-leaps,' like the butterflies.

' As though escaped from nature's hand  
Ere perfect quite.'

Here freedom is the freedom of innocence and leisure ; but more often it appears as the determination to understand things, and possess oneself and them, and then to use this freedom in the service of creative power. This leads



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the lonely craftsman in Mr. Drinkwater's *Carver in Stone* to solitude because the forces of custom round him are too crushing to be temporised with, but in *The Fires of God* this resigned contentment changes to a more exultant mood of union with the 'strong earth-passionate men with souls of fire.' There we might leave it, so far, at least, as the artist is concerned ; for art may be content with a sense of freedom which has learned the way to be expressive. But there is a homelier passage in Mr. Abercrombie's *End of the World* which, though a dialogue in character, puts the general meaning of the relation between freedom and power too significantly to be disregarded. Faced with the final overthrow, two village craftsmen, Merrick the smith and Sollers the wainwright, are pondering on the great things they have had from life, and the former says :—

‘ There'd seem,

A part of me speaking about myself :

“ You know this is much more than being happy.

’Tis hunger of some power in you, that lives

On your heart's welcome for all sorts of luck,

But always looks beyond you for its meaning.”

And that's the way the world's kept going on,

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I believe now. Misery and delight  
Have both had liking welcome from it, both  
Have made the world keen to be glad and sorry.  
For why? It felt the living power thrive  
The more it made everything, good and bad,  
Its own belonging, forged to its own affair—  
The living power that would do wonders some day.'

And then Sollers chimes in to say he has felt the need

'To keep in me living at its best  
The skill that must go forward and shape the world  
Helping it on to make some masterpiece.'

In passages like these we seem to come closer to the inner meaning of these writers. No doubt when a group of people are united by a certain community of spirit, and yet are not committed to any definite principles, it is easy to over-emphasise both their unanimity and their convictions. At any rate I have not tried to minimise them in the interests of an impersonal standard. The question now arises whether writers who are so engrossed by their own experiences and so bent on finding a personal satisfaction will square, in any sense, with our realistic criterion. It may be urged that here

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is the very thing which realism has been visibly discarding. These are the Romantics of 1830 over again in the guise of 1900. The form of temperament has changed, no doubt ; will has challenged the supremacy of feeling ; but in all essentials this is the lyrical, romantic spirit, steeped in the atmosphere of its own moods and its private satisfactions, and seeing all other things and other people through the refraction of that. Even if we refuse to call them romantic, we should surely have to grant that they are unashamedly idealists. What else can be the meaning of the ruthless criticism of shams, the fierce impulse to express and satisfy the spirit, which have been suggested as characteristics of their work ?

Like most artists of a transitional period—it seems hardly necessary to labour the point that we are still living in a transition—the new writers may well have elements in them that are strangely mixed, and discordant with each other. Their preoccupations, at any rate, have not numbed their eagerness to represent the stuff and variety of the world round them. They have carried on the realistic tradition, ‘ saturating ’ themselves,

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in Henry James's phrase, with their subject, and only insisting that the facts given should be expressive. They have brought especially what might be called a new realism into poetry, reveling in the smallest and most familiar themes, not so literally as Crabbe or so seriously as Wordsworth, but with an amused grace and humour that seem to have rediscovered the joys latent in little things:—

‘Narrow places, where the hand can feel  
Something beside, and know that it is real.’

But where, from the realist's point of view, they have chiefly succeeded, is in depicting their own situation—the problem of a new, remorselessly critical generation faced with traditions and conventions that are wearing thin. This is, in a sense, what might be expected; they have only to tell us what they themselves think and feel. But their picture of the old society will surely survive also as a ‘document.’ It is cruel; some might say that it is doomed to be untrue because the critics are bent on showing the contrast between what the older generation is and what it believes itself to be. But this

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ironic impulse has its value as a guarantee of realism.

The ironic impulse is bequeathed from Samuel Butler, whose blend of humorous coolness and subterranean enthusiasm makes him peculiarly a master of the transition. So long as this influence speaks from his own books and from those of Mr. Shaw, it will act as a dissolvent of the romantic spirit. It is true that the preferences of the new writers often lead them to what used to be the special confines of romanticism. Their most vivid creativeness is often shown in representing a purely emotional experience, and this may seem a sign of the subjective mood. But it is a trait of the romantic artist to substitute his own feelings for the feelings he describes. He imagines a situation or development which should have its own emotional sequence or colour, and instead of giving us the real sequence he gives the impression which it makes on him. This is just the opposite of the realist's experience in creating. Flaubert felt in writing *Madame Bovary* the joy of being what he described, of circulating through the character he was depicting. In other words, he identified himself with

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his creations, while the romantic artist identifies his creations with his mood. Sometimes the Georgian writers seem to betray this romantic bias ; Mr. Compton Mackenzie particularly does. Was it romanticism or perplexity that inspired the curiously inconsequent *dénoûment* of *Carnival* or the highly coloured close to *Sinister Street* ? On the other hand, the psychological treatment is often true and strong even when practically all attention is concentrated on the emotional values. In reading Miss Viola Meynell's novels, for instance, we may revolt against a world which seems to be uniquely peopled by temperaments instead of struggling people, but we recognise the vivacity and truth of these temperamental reactions.

Serge Folyat in *Round the Corner* says that people may be divided into two classes—those who turn everything that happens to them into matter for indulgence, and those who turn it into matter for experience. The work of the new school, as a whole, certainly bears the stamp of the second class. For them each new situation or individuality is a fresh question put to life. They are trying to 'connect,' and though their

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own freedom and expression may be the most important thing to them, they can only realise it by penetrating the true nature of what lies all round. Therefore their prevailing spirit is not a revolt from earth but a return to it. The bearing of this on their truth of representation is manifest ; distortion would really be for them not only an æsthetic but a moral mistake. Life is the interest whether it is inner or outer, and neither is to be falsified to the advantage of the other. They cannot adopt either of the romantic alternatives—to regard the world as the accident of their own sensibility, or construct a fictitious world which is exciting but untrue. Nor can they return to the position of the naturalists, for whom non-human nature and the universe were something at once external and dreadfully absorbent, resolving spiritual values into irrelevant physical terms. They have seen that both the inner and outer worlds have their own rights, and that the problem is to put them in their true relation.

The real difficulty in estimating these writers is one already alluded to—their entanglement with life. They are not, as the great Romantics

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were, individualists of feeling ; they are individualists of the will. They insist on carrying their own perplexities into their art, and striving for an answer there. Judging by the conventional standards of representation, we might feel inclined to say that they were confusing art with life. Life, we should say, must be lived at first-hand and its questions answered in living ; then you may distil its essence into art. The disarray of the new art arises from its offering us only the raw material or the mere process of experience. But why should we condemn the experiment in advance ? We may be only at the threshold of its possibilities. The interest of this phase of art seems to be precisely that it aims at a much closer intimacy between art and the experience of living ; and so long as that is prompted by a reverence, in Samuel Butler's words, ' for those things which do alone deserve it—that is, for the things which *are*, which mould and fashion us, be they what they may,' it cannot fail to have a poignant realism.



## CHAPTER VIII

### REALISM IN THOUGHT

Philosophy and Art—Realism in Art and Realism in Philosophy—‘Existence’ and ‘Independence’—Realistic Criticism of Modern Idealism—of Sensationalism—Mind and Body—Secondary Qualities—Abstract Realism; Mr. Russell—Concrete Realism; Professor Alexander—New Realism; Professor Holt—Realism and Relations.

THE influence of art on philosophy, and that of philosophy on art, are alluring problems which it is not easy to solve. The obvious cases are those where philosophy gives the impulse. There is no questioning the immense effect of Descartes on the French literature of his age; and the Frenchmen of the eighteenth century owed a debt hardly less real, though less palpable, to the English philosophers beginning with Locke. The reverse situation, where art gives the signal, is implied in Hegel's famous remark that philosophy paints her ‘grey-in-grey’ only when some living form of activity has grown old. But this

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hardly encourages us to think of an immediate exchange ; it rather suggests philosophy brooding, as in a museum, over the dry, dead specimens of life and art. Perhaps the response is not always so delayed. Life itself, in the sense of the whole social complex, may provide an atmosphere in which art and thought can fertilise each other. Diluted in that medium, they will take the universal form which allows them to communicate. But so far as method and results are concerned, art and philosophy must each follow their distinct tradition ; artist reacts upon artist, and philosopher on philosopher. This reaction is particularly strong in the case of the philosophical succession ; realism in modern thought almost always emerges by way of protest against a contrary view.

The question of exchange between art and philosophy cannot be finally settled unless we decide whether an identical inspiration is possible for the two. Can the same spirit express itself in a speculative and an artistic form ? In the case of realism the assumption here has been that this is possible ; that the name implies a real community, and is not merely equivocal. We

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have found realistic art to be a vivid form of representation which takes for granted the reality of the actual world. It rises from a lively sense of that reality ; man feels himself at one with what is existing round him, and his imagination works within the limits of what interests him there. Even the disillusion of a later, gloomier realism is a tribute to this first delight, for it only means that the flights of our exuberant hope or fancy have been checked by the passion for what *is*. But the physical nature of the actual world is not the only or the most significant truth about it ; realistic art, as we have seen, is not materialism or naturalism. The essential point is that this world is there to start with ; it is something which the artist finds and responds to, and he can only represent it realistically on condition of remembering, however unreflectively, that it is not the creature of his thought or fancy. In other words the world, though he belongs to it, does not depend on him ; it is he, rather, who depends on it. Flaubert's impersonal passion for what interested him is the best illustration of this. He surrendered himself entirely to the arresting object until, as

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he says, it entered into his very soul and 'cried out' to him to represent it. And even the newer realists, who cannot dissociate their art from their own experiences in living, are true to realism in so far as their creations are born of the effort to bring themselves into harmony with 'the things that are,' and tested by the criterion of their agreement with them.

The attitude of the philosophic realist is very much the same, especially in the modern forms of it. The first point he stresses is that of actual existence ; the existence of physical objects and a physical world. This natural belief, which it may seem insanity to question, he states in philosophic terms only because the idealists have challenged it. When stated and analysed, it is found to be only part of a wider principle, which may be called that of 'independence.' This means that actual things, like the tables and chairs in one's room, the sky and fields outside it—and most realists would add, the colour of the grass and the sound of the wind—are there independently of whether we see them, feel them, or know them. They are not 'only a thing in my dream,' or any one else's. Being

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known, or seen, or experienced in any way by us is a relation into which they may enter, but they are not bound to enter it. Indeed, some realists would say that the nature of a thing is independent of all relations, meaning by this, not that it can be found out of connection with anything—a man, for instance, must have a father, and belong to some race and live in one hemisphere or other—but that its nature can be stated without giving these relations, and still less all the relations, in which it is involved. And it is not only existing things and their processes which are ‘independent.’ The same may be said of the general truths in logic and mathematics, and possibly of ethical and æsthetic ultimates like goodness and beauty. ‘These have a nature of their own which is not created by our thinking : we do not make or alter them ; we find them. ‘Certainly the Pythagorean Proposition and the process of long division have seen many generations pass, nations perish, and goodly sea coasts subside beneath the waves.’<sup>1</sup>

It is on lines like these that realists have

<sup>1</sup> Holt, *The Concept of Consciousness*, p. 120.

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always tracked the secret of reality, however the forms of their realism have varied. The independent being of things—of things which do not exist physically as well as those which do—is what they are trying to interpret. The medieval realists theorised in a world where science did not exist, and logic was supreme within the limits conceded by theology. The scholastic controversy was well alight before the rediscovery of Aristotle's physical and metaphysical works modified this logical supremacy. So it was for their logical universals that the medieval realists claimed a real being, independent of our ideas or names for them, and independent (in the extremest forms of the doctrine) of the particular actual things in which they were embodied. They had no need to assert the independence of the physical world, for it had not yet seemed to any one that it was the product of a brooding self-consciousness. But the high claims which they made for their abstract universals were bound to discredit the individual objects of our fleeting, finite world, however they might entrench and fortify those supposed 'real kinds' in nature which biology has since

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exploded. When, therefore, some hundreds of years later, Reid and his friends came forward to defend the reality of the actual world against the sceptics who reduced it to mere sensations or appearances, it looked as though the meaning of realism had been inverted. It was now particular, individual things, which seemed to be the centre of interest.

Yet Reid also interpreted reality in terms of independence, only for him the principle pointed above all to the independent existence of physical things. The title of his theory—‘the philosophy of common sense’—aptly defines what he was doing ; he had been driven to champion the kind of reality which ordinary experience takes for granted. And, as we have seen already, he did this in a way which throws a light backwards on the sources of realism. The sense of existence was explicitly stated. ‘When I feel pain,’ Reid says, ‘I am compelled to believe that the pain that I feel has a real existence. When I perceive any external object, my belief of the real existence of the object is irresistible.’<sup>1</sup> But Reid was so thoroughgoing, not to say uncritical, in

<sup>1</sup> Reid, *Works*, vol. i. p. 368.

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the way he maintained the existence of the actual, that independence changed in his hands to isolation. Matter was one kind of substance and mind was another ; how then could they communicate directly ? Not all the ' natural principles ' which he produced as they were needed could guarantee the contact.

The modern realists have Reid's errors to profit by, but they are in a much more complicated situation. For there has been in the interval a vast reconstruction of idealism, originating in Kant's attempt to solve the problem which Reid had handled. The chief feature of this process—as seen, at least, from our present angle—is that it forms a long, persistent effort to escape from a doctrine of unreality. The idealists have utterly abjured those ' ideas and images ' which seemed to eviscerate reality and screen it from our eyes. They have been steadily bent on refuting the charge that their doctrine is ' subjective,' capricious, uncertain ; they are determined to find a basis that shall be ' objective,' universal, *certain*. Idealism has become a quest for comprehensiveness and system. In this quest the idealists have made special use of a



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fresh instrument of knowledge—the theory of ‘relations.’ It is not their monopoly, but it is they who have used it most audaciously. The conception of relations is the dominating feature of modern metaphysics and logic, as the conception of values is becoming in modern ethics. For the medieval realists universals had to be assimilated to substances in order to be real, and that was the chief cause of their difficulties. When we see that universals may also express relations, such as likeness or position, we are freed at a stroke from a large number of the spectral abstractions which haunted the schoolmen. No less clearly, thought the idealists, will the view of nature as a network of relations take away the reproach that we believe in what is subjective or unreal.

The most massive and persuasive attempt that has been made to build reality out of relations is Green’s *Prolegomena to Ethics*. The whole aim of the theory, in Green’s words, ‘is to articulate coherently the conviction of there being a world of abiding realities other than, and determining, the flow of our feelings.’<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Green, *Prolegomena to Ethics*, p. 45.

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It claims to be based on the consciousness of objectivity. But in the argument consciousness and objectivity turn out to be the same thing. We are told that since all possible experience forms a single related system, there must be an unifying principle at work in consciousness. So the unity of mind is deduced from the unity of experience. But then the unity of experience in turn depends on the unity of mind. For these relations which connect the whole vast system that we call the universe exist, we are told,

‘ Only for consciousness ; and if in themselves they were external to it, we shall try in vain to conceive any process by which they could find their way from without to within it. They are relations of facts, which require a consciousness alike to present them as facts and to unite them in relation. We must hold then that there is a consciousness for which the relations of fact, that form the object of our gradually attained knowledge, already and eternally exist ; and that the growing knowledge of the individual is a progress towards this consciousness.’<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Green, *Prolegomena to Ethics*, p. 84.

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Thus idealism is still subjective. All it has done is to shift the weight from the weakest to the strongest link of the chain. It makes no difference to the argument whether it is an individual or an eternal consciousness that bears the burden of reality ; the essence of reality still consists in its being thought or known. But Green's emphasis on the system of relations, and his view of the larger consciousness as one for which that related system 'already and eternally exists,' foreshadow a certain change of direction in the idealism of his successors. The idealists make a still further attempt to transfigure the subjective side of their doctrine. They have undergone the common influence which has led the most unwilling of us back to realise the interest and variety of the actual world. 'Therefore the 'system of related facts,' the whole contents of existence and acquisitions of knowledge, count for more and more in their theory. But what counts for most is the unity or connectedness which they find implied in every fragment of experience. Perfect coherence is an unattainable ideal for a consciousness as incomplete as ours. Yet it is still consciousness,

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the union of the mind and what it knows—a two-in-one whose sides can never be parted—that remains the highest type of unity. Therefore the goal of idealism, the wholly real and the wholly true, can be nothing short of an absolute experience or ‘absolute self-fulfilment.’

Once it has embraced the Absolute idealism is committed, sooner or later, to an indiscriminate acceptance of things. If it lays stress on the relative and contradictory aspects of the finite world, this is only to enhance the transcendence of the Absolute, where every fresh discordant element ‘is laid up as a positive increase of character in the reality.’<sup>1</sup> Our finite efforts cannot alter the Universe, but in being seen as a system it becomes somehow perfect. Perhaps despondency rather than enthusiasm must be the fruit of this doctrine, which first forbids us to believe in anything and then exhorts us to believe in all. Idealism only escapes from the dilemma by emphasising the character of perfection or coherence in what already exists and is known. Everything is the product of spirit, for everything leads up to the totality of a

<sup>1</sup> Bradley, *Appearance and Reality*, p. 204.

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perfect experience. But the distinctive value of spirit seems to vanish, and with it the main-spring of idealism, when it becomes the universal predicate of things as well as thought.

Outstripping Hegel, when he exemplified his Idea in the Teutonic consciousness and the Prussian State, modern idealism has arrived at the beatification of everything. How has this optimism been forced on it? It is because the upholders of the theory have made a point of finding one common characteristic in all reality—that of being the product or reflection of thought. If unity and coherence are the essence of thinking, they must also be discovered everywhere in the real. The realist, too, may desire coherence, but he does not insist in advance that everything shall be of the same colour and contribute to the same plan. We can now see, however, how different his situation is from that of his predecessor Reid. Reid confronted an antagonist who had disproved everything; the modern realist complains that his opponents prove too much.

Sainte-Beuve said of Pascal, who had this same craving for mental certitude, that the world only

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interested him from the sixth day of creation, when it was reflected in human intelligence. He lived in the clear citadel of the mind and would not peer into the darkness beyond it. In the same way idealism is dazzled by the mind's illumination. The psychological cause of this is to be found in what an American thinker<sup>1</sup> calls suggestively the 'egocentric predicament.' He means that there is nothing you can discover in the universe which, then and there, you do not make your own by thinking. Whatever you mention is, by the fact of the matter, something that you feel or know. You may call a thing black or white, but in the very act you have introduced yourself and related it to your perception. Ultimately you find that any possible reference to anything also implies consciousness. 'You cannot find fact,' Mr. Bradley says, 'unless in unity with sentience.' The conscious mind, then, may be in one sense our source of illumination, but in another it seems to be 'the fatal shadow that walks by us still.'

<sup>1</sup> Professor R. B. Perry, to whose three chapters on idealism in his *Present Philosophical Tendencies* I am particularly indebted.

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We are so made that we cannot escape from ourselves.

Now from this dilemma you may conclude, if you wish, with Mr. Bradley, that 'reality is sentient experience.' But equally well you may draw the opposite conclusion. Indeed, as regards that exercise of consciousness which we call knowing, there does not seem to be any other conclusion which you can draw. For knowledge presupposes that there is something there already which, as we say, we come to know. There may be a cottage on a certain spot in the Hebrides, there may be a general election going on in Sweden, and there may have been a tragedy in the house where you are living now, but none of these things depend on your knowledge of them, or on the knowledge of anybody except those who are, or have been, engaged in making the fact or event. Knowledge means that we know—something; something which we 'did not make and cannot mar' by the fact of getting to know it. It may make or mar *us* when known; but that is a different affair.

So it seems there are things which do not depend, at any rate, on knowledge; and they

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are real in the sense that they exist or have existed. It is perfectly true that what we find we find, but we can now decline to regard this as anything more terrifying than a truism. The dilemma reduces to the platitude that what is known is known. But Mr. Bradley's words were 'sentient experience.' It may very well be meaningless, as a rule, to speak of things as dependent on our knowledge ; but it might be true and inevitable to say that they depend on 'sentience' properly so called—that is, on our feelings and perceptions. This was the line of the older idealists, who argued that the world depended on our consciousness because it was the essence of the things which composed it to be felt or perceived.<sup>1</sup> Therefore the realist who challenges their position must inquire what is the nature of the external world, and how we come to perceive it.

For a doctrine of 'sentience' in its extreme form we should not go to Mr. Bradley, but to Mach, for whom the world is composed of sensations, and the supposed unities body and mind are, in his own words, 'only makeshifts,' so that any

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Prichard, *Kant's Theory of Knowledge*, pp. 121, 122.



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real distinction between them is obliterated ; or else to Mr. Bertrand Russell, who has abandoned the ranks of the realists for those of the sensationalists, and holds that the world we know is a construction that we make out of sense-data or 'appearances.' The realist is bound to contest these views, though the way in which he does so will depend on the shade of his realism, and we cannot read far without discovering that the variety of shades is immense. The realism which comes nearest to Reid's common-sense view, and might be described as Reid made critical, will join battle at once over the term 'appearances.' It points out that all our language about appearances or what 'looks' so-and-so implies that we are already aware of space and bodies extended in it. And our thought and language also imply that a thing is what it is whether any one is there to perceive it or not. Indeed, 'it is so far from being true that we only know what things look and not what they are, that in the case of spatial relations we actually know what things are, even though they never look what they are.' <sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Prichard, *Kant's Theory of Knowledge*, p. 91.

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A 'new realist' like Professor Perry, on the other hand, counters Mach's position with the reminder that it leaves a large number of characteristics out of sight. Sentience is one relation in which things can stand to us, but it is not the only one. Other relations, logical or possibly fundamental in the sense that they belong to the very basis of our world, are common to both mind and body, and a theory which dissolves things into sensations or *sensibilia* fails wholly to account for them. Sensationalism in philosophy commits, in fact, the same error as naturalism in art ; it reduces everything to one category and one level of experience.

We can now see an escape from the dilemma as to how one thing called mind can know other things called bodies. The answer is that mind is not what Descartes conceived it to be, an isolated thinking substance, but is always mind-with-body, a consciousness inhabiting an organism, and working through nervous processes. Thus from the first it is united and continuous with the world it knows. It may be possible to go further and say with the American 'new realists' that all the elements of mind and body are

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ultimately interchangeable. But it is enough for our argument that what we know as mind and matter are united by their common share in the fundamental characteristics of things, such as time, space, identity and order; and that our individual minds work always by means of our bodies. Once we have really grasped—and how seldom the idealist philosopher has grasped it!—that our bodies are related organically to our minds, there is no longer any difficulty in believing reflectively, what we all believe instinctively, that we do directly perceive real things. The function of the senses is not to set up images or impressions which are a screen between us and reality, but to make contact with the real. A brilliant writer who has long abandoned philosophy for fairy tales once pointed out a simple fact which some philosophers forget; we do not see our eyes—the image on the retina—we see *with* our eyes.<sup>1</sup>

We may take it, then, that common sense was not wrong in supposing that there are objects

<sup>1</sup> F. W. Bain, *On the Realisation of the Possible*, p. 140. Mr. Bain wrote his pungent defence of Aristotelian Realism at a time (1899) when to apologise for realism was more dangerous than fashionable.

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all round us which persist whether we are there to notice them or not. But there still remains the question, how much of them persists when we are not there ? Granted that shape, size, and mobility are features really belonging to these outward things, is it so sure that in the absence of our sensitive organism they are, for instance, blue, odorous, or noisy ? It would be impossible to argue here at length the vexed question as to the status of the secondary qualities. The great majority of realists believe that they are as much a part of the objects as the primary qualities are. Berkeley observed long ago that the arguments which proved tastes and colours to exist only in the mind would prove the same thing with equal force of extension, figure, and motion. The realists agree that the same reasoning applies to both cases ; only what is proved, they think, is that all these qualities are not mental but external. The argument from the variability of our experience as regards tastes and colours does not really hold. Our experiences of the primary qualities also vary ; yet we have seen reason to think that they really inform us about the spatial elements of things. People have been led to

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believe in the entire difference of the two sets of qualities chiefly because sounds and colours need the intervention of a medium like air or light (also external to us) in order to become perceptible, in a way that the primary qualities do not. The preoccupation of physical science with the primary qualities of things has emphasised this fact and made it the basis of a dogma which it does not really support. So we come to think of nature as a skeleton or an 'unearthly ballet' of invisible forces; having taken away the concrete we do not know how to give it back again. Realism at least reminds us that these sciences work by abstraction, and that nature, even if she is indifferent to us, is still the various and lovely being, *dædala rerum*, which we knew.

Here it would be natural to ask what the realists say about consciousness, and we might ask the question, but only to receive divided answers, for they are not yet agreed whether it is a quality or simply a relation, and to discuss the several answers would require a chapter by itself. To get a final and more positive view of realism it will be best to put the whole theory

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on the defensive by urging a general objection which has been often brought against it. It runs somewhat as follows. 'You have avoided,' the objectors say, 'the soaring and grovelling generalisations; you do not erect reality into thought or abase it to sensation. But your criticism of the theories which do these things can be turned against yourselves, because what you have done is to place everything in the empty category of Being. Therefore instead of theories which at least are interesting you can only offer in exchange what is either a vexatious platitude, or, as you sometimes urge it, a manifest untruth.'

We have seen already that these would be the kind of deficiencies charged against realism. It offers no thrilling revelation about reality, and seems to tell us even less than we supposed we knew. This minimum may be the truth about some things, but it can hardly be the truth about all. Now it is an interesting trait of the modern realists that they are on the whole more chary of using the word 'reality' than the idealists are. The psychological basis of their thinking is still, we may believe, the sense of existing things. The one fundamental point on which they are all

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agreed is that neither thought nor perception nor sensation sustains the universe, but that, as Professor Alexander puts it, 'mind is but one thing together with other things in the world . . . the most gifted individual in a democracy of things.'<sup>1</sup> All these things exist physically ; and if physical existence is reality, they are real. At the same time reflection shows that there are other things or facts, such as the truths of mathematics and logic, which are valid, for we cannot deny them ; though they are not living things which are born and die. It is the peculiar nature of these things, like the process of long division or the law of contradiction, to hold good all the time ; and we do not make them, we find that they hold good. We cannot help saying of them, therefore, that in some way they have being or 'are' ; and we can do that without prejudging the question as to what they are or how they are. So, at least, some realists would say ; but in truth realism cannot press this question, can hardly even state it, without inclining fairly definitely in one of two

<sup>1</sup> Alexander, 'The Method of Metaphysics,' in *Mind*, N.S., xxi. 6.

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directions. Either it will follow the path of abstraction, and suggest that these universals not only can be studied, but that they 'subsist,' in a timeless region of their own ; or else it will hold that while they can indeed be isolated for purposes of thought, they are by their nature more or less deeply implicated in the foundations of the actual world.

Mr. Russell takes the first road, and places these universals in 'a world which is neither mental nor physical.'<sup>1</sup> Of this, and the contrasting world of experience, he has written in a vivid passage :—

'The world of being is unchangeable, rigid, exact, delightful to the mathematician, the logician, the builder of metaphysical systems, and all who love perfection more than life. The world of existence is fleeting, vague, without sharp boundaries, without any clear plan or arrangement, but it contains all thoughts and feelings, all the data of sense, and all physical objects, everything that can do either good or harm, everything that makes any difference to the value of life and the world. According to

<sup>1</sup> Russell, *The Problems of Philosophy*, p. 140.



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our temperaments, we shall prefer the contemplation of the one or of the other.' <sup>1</sup>

This view—if it is meant to be more than a metaphor—would sever philosophy from life and fact. All universals would be entirely abstract; all concrete things would be particulars which we should vainly try to grasp. Metaphysics, whatever else it might be, would not be an interpretation of *our* world. 'Values'—the objects or expressions of our preferences—would have no base or certainty. Not only would life become unmeaning, but thought itself, if Mr. Russell's view was pressed to its conclusion, would be surely impossible. Unless realism is to revert to the abstractions of the schoolmen and the earlier speculations of Plato, it can only accept this passage as the natural but naïve expression of a philosopher's pure joy in thinking.

If we are unwilling to embrace abstractions, there is the alternative of a more concrete realism, such as Professor Alexander has traced in outline. For him the most general relations or universals—identity, difference, spatiality, causality—are not abstractions unless you choose

<sup>1</sup> Russell, *The Problems of Philosophy*, p. 156.

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to make them so ; they are inherent in all existence. If you take them out of their context you can consider them abstractly as pure forms ; but it would be misleading to ascribe a special kind of abstract being to them when they are part of the texture of actual things. If we call them real we must say they are so as being the fundamental characteristics of all that exists in space and time. Reality will then be for us the individual or existent, only we must recognise that the individual is the meeting-place of all sorts of universals. As Professor Alexander writes of mind :—

‘ Into the constitution of mind there enter the formal elements, and above all the fundamental ones of space and time, which enter also into physical and living things. The empirical existence mind is an outcome of and is built upon the lower levels of empirical existence, in which also these formal elements are contained. The mind has a body of life ; life has a body of physical and chemical properties ; and perhaps the secondary qualities have a body of primary ones. *In this sense* the empirical qualities of the lower level are carried up into the higher level. The formal

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characters belong to each level alike. Mind is the most perfect form we know of empirical existence in which these formal elements appear.’<sup>1</sup>

A concrete reality of this kind is what Plato seems to be thinking of when he says in the *Philebus* that the truest kind of being is ‘mixture’—being which has *come* to be. Is there, then, a ‘being’ which has not ‘become’? The puzzle looks a mere puzzle of words and seems to lead us back into the region of abstractions. But in his *Concept of Consciousness* Professor Holt has drawn out a bold and ingenious sketch-plan of the realms of being which offers a kind of harmony between abstract and concrete. For this American writer being is not merely a logical postulate. He finds that science has analysed the matter which we once supposed solid into such impalpable elements as energy-units and electrons; and that the first terms of physics are really identical in nature with the last terms of logic and applied mathematics. Of these units we can say no more than that they ‘are’; and if we want an adjective to describe their character the only possible one

<sup>1</sup> Alexander, *The Basis of Realism*, p. 31.

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is not mental or physical but neutral. Yet neutral is what we also have to call our conceptions or ideas, for truths of thought are not private to any mind in particular, they are objective ; and they are accessible to all minds because they can be communicated without changing their nature. The cleavage between mind and matter collapses, and the constituents of both are reduced to a universal type of being for which ' neutral ' seems the only predicate.

Thus ' being ' reveals itself as a system immensely complex, but graded from the barest, formal elements up to human lives and the world of values which exists for them. All its elements are interchangeable ; it is only a difference in the way they are organised that produces a new type of being.

Some might object to Professor Holt that he is treating logical forms as if they were real existences, and that as a matter of fact there are gaps in his series, as, for instance, in the transition from chemical processes to life. But it is always possible that science may bridge these chasms, and that the true metaphysic would be simply an exhibition of everything in its serial order.

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The crucial difficulty for Professor Holt's philosophy, as for every other, is that of time. Is everything inside some time-order? And if so, how can reality or knowledge ever be complete? Professor Holt, unlike Professor Alexander, places some elements of being outside time, only they are not the perfections of the Absolute, but the barest categories of form. When realism constructs a metaphysic, which as yet it has hardly tried to do, it will have to face the time question, which is also the question of what metaphysics means. Is it the knowledge of a timeless 'super-sensible' Reality, or a science of the ultimate nature of everything which exists in time?

The alliance which many realists have made with modern applied logic—the traces are very evident in Professor Holt's book—seems to minimise the element of time. On the other hand, they have developed the logic of relations and the idea of different contexts of experience in a way which bears directly on actual things. The logic of relations, while apparently telling us about terms, interprets conditions of existence. It is clear that relations are not all of one kind. Some make the terms which they unite causally

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dependent on one another ; others do not prevent the terms from existing independently of the particular relation. No inquiry can do justice to the question if it assumes, as it has been the fashion to do, that all relations whatever are either 'internal' or 'external.' Professor Alexander points out that there are some which belong to all existing things, and so may be called intrinsic ; these are the relations of time and space, which connect every actual thing ; the relations of quality and 'greater or less,' which apply to everything that has magnitude, and others of the same fundamental kind. There is also a type of relation which is partly intrinsic ; these belong necessarily to one class of real things, but not to all realities. The filial relation is one of these, since no one can be a man without being the son of somebody. Finally there are relations of the kind we may call extrinsic because they are accidental ; like the paternal relation, because a man need not be a father, or the relation of kingship, because he need not be a king.<sup>1</sup>

Existence is caught in a network of relations—so far realist and idealist agree—but the realist

<sup>1</sup> Alexander, 'Relations,' in *Mind*, N.S., vol. xxi.

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does not think that these relations are made by the mind, and he finds that the implication of one thing with others is only equalled by the elasticity with which it passes into an entirely fresh context. 'A man can be a national hero, a socialist, a carpenter, a husband, a pietist, and a villain, at one and the same time. In exactly the same way a certain shade of red can be the quality on a tulip, and can be immediately within the experience of a hundred lookers-on at the same time.'<sup>1</sup> The idealist will take this as a sign, not of the independence of things, but of the way in which everything is entangled with something else, and he will very likely conclude that these finite parts cannot exist as such in the infinite whole. But when the realist speaks of independence, he does not mean a severance from any sort of relation, but only the absence of certain kinds of relationship, which Professor Perry sums up as those of the whole to its parts (not, it may be noticed, that of the parts to the whole), exclusive causation, implying and being exclusively implied.<sup>2</sup> Now the carpenter need not

<sup>1</sup> Holt, *op. cit.*, p. 153.

<sup>2</sup> Perry, *The New Realism*, pp. 113, 117.

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be a socialist or a hero, and the tulip need not be seen by you or by me. An individual person may be a complex of many qualities or characteristics, and yet these may be ultimate or simple qualities which do not cause or imply one another. We should be at a loss to say, for instance, how whiteness could depend on goodness. So too the tulip exists, but it is a matter of accident whether it passes into the relation of being known to me.

In saying this the realist would not deny—who could deny it?—that reciprocity and dependence are also facts in the world. He denies only that everything depends on its being experienced, or (until the idealist can prove it) on the whole in which it is found. But evidently there is one region of things very closely related to our consciousness, and perhaps in some degree depending on it ; it is the realm of ethics and æsthetics, goodness and beauty, of human choice and motive and imaginative creation, of ‘ everything that makes any difference to the value of life and the world.’ This region of values is still before us ; and the way through it leads back to art and life.



## CHAPTER IX

### REALISM AND VALUES

Ideals and Values—The Limitations of Ideals—Origin of the term Value—Value, Need, and Liking—Intrinsic Value—Value a Relation, not a Quality—Value and Judgment—Moral Value—The Science of Values and the Science of Ethics—Changes of Value—Absolute Values—Realism and Life.

WITHIN the last few years it has become less fashionable to talk of ideals in discussions about art and life. The ideals themselves have not perished—indeed, experience seems to show that the fact which they express is a singularly living one—but we prefer to call them by another name. Where some time ago people would have spoken of ideals as a matter of course, they now talk of values. The change is not to be dismissed at once as a fad or a mere bit of slang or preciousness, for we find it among the gravest philosophers. It does really express a change of attitude towards the things which

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matter most to us. It is part of the movement towards realisation and satisfaction, which has been noticed already as characteristic of our way of looking at life, our literature, and our thought. This will be seen most clearly when we ask what values are, but it is suggested also by the nature of ideals.

An ideal, as a rule, is simply our idea of something more perfect—a perfection imagined or conceived. It has been charged against ideals in general, a little unfairly, that we can never enjoy them, since the moment we attain them they cease to be. There is truth enough in this if we regard an ideal as though it were but the goal or end of a journey. But there is no reason why it should not also be a type or pattern which can be actualised in life or art, and then, if we are ever fortunate enough to realise it, we are not obliged to say that in that moment it has ceased to be an ideal, unless we take the very abstract view of ideals and universals which was criticised in the last chapter. But none the less there is an inherent degree of unreality about ideals. Whatever may be the full meaning of the fact they stand for, they express that side of it which exists

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above all for the mind. An ideal is made by imagination and thought. And it is not our hopes and feelings which the word suggests, nor the effort to satisfy them, but the imagined, intellectual element—a glorified idea. The stress is on its contrast to the 'real.'

We think of the creations of the mind as being permanent and universal, and this strength may belong to our ideals. But an ideal is also a human instrument, used and mixed in with life, and the very strength which the mind lends may betray it. The ideal of one person may impose itself on others who do not really want it, whose needs and natures it does not express, but who are captivated by the imaginative aspect which is so easily communicated and so often proves alluring. So it becomes a fetter upon impulse and even upon thought. Or, again, it may outlive its meaning—that first desire or aspiration which really gave it life. While the surest way of desiccating ideals is to imprison them in institutions, even as mere mind-creations they may cumber the ground, like the empty shells of ruined buildings. What first showed itself as an inspiration and a dawn of possibilities becomes

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a bar upon development, because it is no longer fed by any genuine flow of feeling.

The question before us is whether values are free from these limitations and perversions which beset ideals. What is the difference, in fact, between ideals and values? This question cannot possibly be answered until we have made clear to ourselves what values are. At present, while people use the word with almost distressing fluency, their acquaintance with its meaning is apt to be loose and vague. Sometimes this uncertainty gives us a flash of surprise. Thus Mr. H. G. Wells, replying in *The Times* to a critic who had made use of the term 'absolute values' as a dialectical counter, said the other day: "'Value" came into philosophical talk, I imagine, by way of studio slang, and originally to express relative importance.'<sup>1</sup> If Mr. Wells meant by 'philosophical talk' the shallower kind of chatter which flits round the borders of philosophy and art, he may possibly have been right. But if he had in mind the writings of philosophers, and of those who, like his critic, were evidently acquainted with them, he was

<sup>1</sup> *The Times Literary Supplement*, 24th May 1917, p. 249.

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almost certainly wrong. It is odd that Mr. Wells, of all writers, should not have guessed that values had an economic origin. Value was a term accepted and explored by economists before it was transferred generally to life and thought. We have borrowed 'value' from economics as long before we borrowed 'good.' The reason why the term has established itself so widely is because the whole atmosphere of modern life is economic and industrial ; we are dominated by considerations of want and use. It is quite true, as Mr. Wells says, that one of the chief senses of value is relative importance, and that this might well have been borrowed from painting. But relative importance is also a prominent sense of the word in economics, and is still more clearly defined there. There is little doubt that the philosophers who first used value as a word of general application had its economic meaning in their minds.

Value means originally the capacity to satisfy a want. A thing which does this is of value to us, and if it does not satisfy our need it is valueless or worthless. But for economics both persons and things are competitive. Value

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depends not only on what is wanted, but on how much it is wanted. The supply of goods is not unlimited, and others need them besides ourselves. 'Our readiness to part with nuts or apples will depend not so much on the degree in which we as isolated individuals prize nuts as compared with apples, but chiefly on the degree in which other people prize apples as compared with nuts.'<sup>1</sup>

It is fairly clear from this that if we transfer value from its economic sense and give it an ethical, social, or æsthetic meaning, we shall do so with a difference. We cannot think of goodness and beauty as limited or competitive in themselves, though the various expressions of them may compete for approval. Still less should we imagine that beauty would be cheapened in value if it became more universal; the fact of its increase would be in itself a sign that it was valued more. The stricter economic implications as to distribution and limitation do not apply, therefore, to value in the general sense. But there is one cardinal aspect of the original meaning which does apply. This is the statement that value is always relative to some need

<sup>1</sup> Seligman, *Principles of Economics*, p. 181.

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or satisfaction. So much so that Harold Höffding, whose book on the *Philosophy of Religion* is one of the most interesting applications of the theory of value, takes over this simple formula bodily for philosophic purposes: 'Value denotes the property possessed by a thing either of conferring immediate satisfaction or serving as a means to procuring it.'<sup>1</sup> It is no longer a question of nuts or apples, but the relation to human need and liking remains. The things—perfectly immaterial things they may be—which we value are those that respond to our instincts, desires, interests or aspirations.

So far, perhaps, common usage and argument would bear us out. But there is no denying that an opposite view has been taken by very distinguished philosophical writers, such as Franz Brentano and Mr. G. E. Moore. For them the essence of value—ethical value is what they are particularly concerned with—is that it is something absolute, objective, independent of human feelings. Mr. Moore's view best repays consideration; he is a realist, and he brings the matter most simply to a point. He

<sup>1</sup> Höffding, *Philosophy of Religion*, p. 12.

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says that 'good' is indefinable, but that to call a thing good is equivalent to saying that it has intrinsic value or that it ought to exist. We need not ask at this moment whether there is any contradiction in identifying goodness with intrinsic value. What we wish to know is the meaning of intrinsic value for Mr. Moore. This he tells us very explicitly in his later book. 'By saying that a thing is intrinsically good it means that it would be a good thing that the thing in question should exist, even if it existed *quite alone*, without any further accompaniments or effects whatever.'<sup>1</sup> Value does not depend on the spectator. 'It is not the same thing as to say that any being or set of beings has towards it any mental attitude whatever—either an attitude of feeling, or of desiring, or of thinking something about it.'<sup>2</sup>

Now there seem to be two objections to this view of absolute or intrinsic value. It is a defiance to our normal way of thinking to suppose that any thing, or state of things, existing 'quite alone, without any further accompaniments or effects whatever,' can have any value at all. And

<sup>1</sup> *Ethics*, p. 65.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 224.



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even Mr. Moore does not appear to think that it can, for he says 'it would be a good thing' that this isolated perfection should exist. But for whom would it be a good thing, or who would pronounce it good? Surely the human spectator is here tacitly reintroduced. He—Mr. Moore or another—awards a certificate of value to the thing in question, and then leaves it wearing that label in a lonely solitude.

Mr. Moore is a realist, and the interest of his position is that it repeats in an uncompromising form a tendency which has been noticed again and again in realism—the tendency to ascribe a form of being independent of our knowledge, thoughts, or feelings, to relations and qualities of an universal nature. Now if we are considering the very simplest determinations of things, such as identity, or extension in space, or succession in time, there is no difficulty in admitting that those are perfectly objective, and independent of anything we may feel or know about them. Or again, if it is a question of the truths of mathematics or the principles of logic, we must equally admit that we do not make them, and they apply to thought and things in the

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universe with a sublime indifference to our fancies. But when we come to a conception like value we cannot help feeling that the case is altered. Here is something—we need not try to decide for the moment exactly what it is—which every association of thought and language obliges us to regard as relative to ourselves, or some kind of living thing. Value implies that a thing is found good for us, or for some purpose, which again is either the conscious purpose of beings like ourselves, or the unconscious emergence and evolution of some form of living existence. By isolating it from this connection Mr. Moore seems, like Socrates or the medieval realists, or like Mr. Russell in the passage quoted in the last chapter, to be trying to save too much on the side of independence. To grant that value is relative does not prejudice the independent existence of valuable things. The solar system and the scenery of Europe exist whether I am interested in them or not. The universe embraces a multiplicity of things and qualities which may be quite indifferent to us, but may acquire value at any moment by being drawn within the range of our consciousness and our desires.

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This consideration throws more light on what value actually is. It can hardly be called a distinct and separate quality of things. It is not exactly a property which belongs to them in addition to their other properties. If, for instance, we take any subject which happens to interest us, such as the history of France, and think of the points which strike us, such as the making of the national character, the predominance of Paris, or the emergence of democracy, we should not think of its 'value' as another quality on the same footing as these. Its value would be the impression or estimate of its characteristic features which we form as interested readers, or as teachers of somebody else. This may be one thing for me and another thing for you ; or it may be one thing now and another in two hundred years. The 'capacity' of French history to be of value is entirely relative to the needs of the person who studies it.

Thus value appears to be a relationship between us and something, rather than a special quality of things. The tendency to think otherwise comes from the common habit of trans-

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ferring the word from the relation to the thing or quality related. It is almost unavoidable that we should speak for short of 'values,' when what we really mean is something on which we set value, such as a particular type of life or character. The greatest qualities or experiences, like truth, beauty, and goodness, are thought of and referred to as values *par excellence*. If we do apply the word to one side of the relation between us and things, it is more reasonable to use it of our side of the relation, since it is we, after all, who confer the value, and our mental state which forms the enjoyment of it. This is one reason why beauty, goodness, and the like so often stand for values simply. Not only are they ultimate, each summing up a whole order of experience beyond which we cannot get in this world ; but they depend for their existence, either wholly or partly, on our experiencing and 'valuing' them.

Among the most resolute champions of the relativity of value to needs and likings are the New Realists of the American school. They are eager to prevent feeling from being robbed of its rights by thought. 'If *a* is good in that I

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need, like, or aspire to it,' Professor Perry says, '*that fact* can be neither made nor unmade by any judgment or opinion concerning it.'<sup>1</sup> Our 'judgments of value' come later, and while they may be true or false according as they agree or disagree with fact, they cannot disturb this initial fact of value, which is made entirely by its relation to our feelings.

These arguments of the New Realists are very intelligible in their nature; they are inspired by a desire to base value firmly on the feelings that we really have. And certainly the experience of liking or caring is the basis of it all, and must be there to start with. But we cannot help suspecting that the New Realists have been carried away a little by an exaggerated fear of idealism. It is doubtful whether the element of judging, or something extremely like it, is ever absent altogether from the movements of inclination, except in the case of half-formed liking or blindly unconscious impulse. And even if judgment played no part in these emotional responses, it would still be a question whether,

<sup>1</sup> *Present Philosophical Tendencies*, p. 335.

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apart from judgment, we are entitled to speak of value at all.

Let us hear one of the most persuasive of idealists on the matter, as it is a point of some importance. Mr. Bosanquet writes thus :—

‘ It is surely plain that the power of an idea to satisfy us is not merely a brute fact, but a matter for logical estimation. The ultimate or fundamental interest is certainly not the *prima facie* interest ; and in general, the immediate fact of interest, which gives us the idea of valuing or caring about anything, is at the opposite pole of experience from the ultimate or fundamental interest in which we find by consideration that all our power of caring would be adequately occupied. . . . And it is not true that there is any purely immediate experience. It is not true that any form of liking, valuing, or caring is unaffected by the shaping of the whole of life, and by the critical reflection which shows us where fulness lies.’ <sup>1</sup>

So far there has been no reason to quarrel seriously with the definition of value as the

<sup>1</sup> Bosanquet, *Principle of Individuality and Value*, pp. 296, 297.

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capacity to satisfy a want. We have only amended it by pointing out that, speaking strictly, value is not a fixed capacity of anything, but rather a relation of interest between the valuer and the valued. But now it seems as if we had come to a real ambiguity. Which is the fundamental fact about value—the want or the satisfaction? The New Realists lay all the stress on the want. Mr. Bosanquet emphasises the satisfaction. ‘Satisfactoriness—which we identify with value,’ as he says elsewhere.

In this debate the realists will point to the simple fact that when we want things we want them. It is not satisfaction which is the object of desire, but something more definite; and that thing, whatever it may be, only satisfies us because we desire it. Unfortunately it is also a common experience that what we desire does not always satisfy us; and there is the further experience, less common but quite familiar, that we are satisfied by something we have not desired. We may desire a holiday in the North and circumstances may drive us to Sussex; but having got there we may find we are perfectly happy. Or, having desired Sussex from the

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first, we may go there and find that the holiday is a failure. The usual reason for this seems to be, as Mr. Bosanquet indicates, that no want or aspiration can be felt entirely by itself, in separation from the rest of *our* self and from its psychical perspective. There is always a fringe of other possibilities in relation to which it occurs to us, and these are not left wholly out of consideration. This may explain why a want or desire can be fulfilled in the letter and yet be absolutely lacking in satisfaction.

But to take account of possibilities implies some judgment or reflection. A strong argument for including a degree of judgment in value is that the relative importance of things was actually an element in the original conception. Economic value was doubly relative ; it not only implied the relation of something to our needs, but a relation of the things valued to one another. Values in painting are relative in a similar way. And further we might ask whether we do not always use valuing as something more than a generally descriptive word for the processes of liking, desiring, or aspiring ? To say that we ' value ' the object of a passing, chance impulse,



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instantaneously satisfied, is almost a contradiction in terms. Some sort of continuance seems implied in value, enough persistence in time for us to reflect, however summarily, and compare. The Austrian theorists on the subject speak of 'normative' value, meaning by it the things which a man habitually prizes, or which he finds good for him on the whole. This element may well be present in value from the first. A value is short-lived, perhaps, insignificant, unsatisfying in a man's life, but he prized it because it seemed to make for his well-being as a whole, or was the best among competing goods.

In admitting that judgment is needed for the making of value, we do not destroy the real liking or caring which is its ground. This is what the New Realists are afraid of. The danger they fear is like that to which 'ideals' seem to be exposed ; it is the danger that other people may persuade you into liking or admiring something which you do not like, which 'means nothing' to you ; or that by a laborious self-persuasion you may go on pursuing aims and objects which have ceased to be of interest. In reply it might be said that if you can be 'argued

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out of ' or into a liking, that fact itself is so far evidence that the liking is not very deep. But so long as you take value as your standard you are reminded that the ground of your choice *is* liking, and not, as in the case of ideals, something that you think you ought to like.

Perhaps this long inquiry into what value means may suggest the idea that a mere word is being treated as though it were a key to unlock all perplexities. Of course, there is no such magic in any word. The only reason for trying to determine what values mean is that the prevailing reference to them points to a real change of mental attitude. People are not different because they talk about values, but they talk about values because they have changed their point of view. The essential difference has been hinted at already ; there is a franker movement to define real needs and choices, and to fulfil them. Although ideals and values can be used as if they were interchangeable terms, standing for just the same ethical, æsthetic, or religious experiences, the form which they give to these experiences is not in fact the same. Ideals are above all a creation of the mind, pointing to

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the best which can be imagined as possible in any sphere. Values are the expression of states of feeling which are actual. While the tendency of ideals is to

‘Fix perfect homes in the unsubstantial sky,  
And say, what is not, shall be bye-and-bye,’

values aim at a good for which the materials are present. It is hard to press the point without seeming unfair to ideals; still, you may conceive an ideal perfection and regard it coldly; but it becomes a value if it embodies what you really feel. The man whose ideals do embody his real feelings will have no inclination to adopt this language. But it is against the abuse of ideals that the argument for values is directed; and in this sense it suggests a return to fact, to the capacities we are actually endowed with and the conditions which invite us to realise them.

This conception of value will apply equally well whether we choose to describe the psychical life in terms of will or feeling. Supposing we take will—or, to use the more technical but wider word, conation—as the psychical unit and the

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general term for describing psychical activity, values will be the direct translation of this inner life into outward forms. We only observe the will in so far as it identifies itself with some interest; and the typical manifestations of will, in a 'strong' or 'unified' character, are seen in the predominance of some central interest, or the grouping of interests in a connected system—which is exactly what is meant by values. If, on the other hand, we go to what is usually regarded as the other extreme of the psychical life, we shall find that values can be usefully related to impulse. Mr. Russell has done a great service lately in pointing out how largely impulse enters into our life, even when we industriously conceal it; and how much of our activity springs from impulse rather than desire.<sup>1</sup> It is impulse or instinct which sets artistic activity in movement, and probably also philosophic speculation. That is to say, these experiences, which we regard as among the very highest and most delightful, are not explicitly governed by purpose or directed to some result.

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Russell, *Principles of Social Reconstruction*, especially pp. 12-19.

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The painter does not want to complete a picture, he wants to paint ; and the philosopher wishes to reason, independently of the goal to which his reasoning may lead him. If you try to bring this kind of experience under the rubric of ideals, the result is very likely to be that you exhort yourself, or are exhorted, to paint in a certain way or to reason to a certain kind of conclusion. The judgment of value, on the other hand, simply states that the activity concerned is a good, or perhaps your chief good ; and the question will then be on what terms to give effect to it. If creative impulse is to be fostered and not thwarted, value may be profitably borne in mind as a guiding conception, for it ensures that these activities will not be slurred because they are not sufficiently purposive ; and in the same way a dangerous impulse will not be simply trampled on, but its possibilities of transformation can be stated.

But there are difficulties and objections which must certainly be met. The spectre of morality cannot be kept out of sight any longer. It will be asked—and it certainly should be asked—what is the criterion for estimating values ? How

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is progress possible? What place is left for ethical value on this view of things? And what becomes of the special feeling of moral obligation?

The first step towards answering these questions is to settle the relation of value to ethics and conduct. Evidently value is the wider term. Values include all possible goods or satisfactions; ethical value is one form of good or one way of regarding good things. Yet for practical purposes it may seem as though we could reverse this and say that ethical value included every other form; for ethics is the science of conduct, and conduct includes everything that we do. We should certainly have to accept this restatement if we looked at things exclusively from the moral or ethical point of view. As a matter of fact, we do not. We admit that we must behave as moral beings, but moral goodness is not the only 'ultimate' value. It shares those honours with truth and beauty, and it may be transcended by the divine. And the practical objection to treating all other forms of value as variants of moral value is that this greatly narrows the field. It constrains us to accept the canonised estimates

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of duty and virtue and to surrender the chance of enlarging them. The chief reason why human progress is so slow, and why it is usually quickened not by moralists but by religious leaders, is that the moralists fix their attention on one class of goods and generally take a very conservative view of them.

But from time to time even moral philosophers revolt. A fresh light was thrown on ethics when Mr. Moore distinguished beyond possibility of mistake the two cardinal questions: What things are good? and, What actions ought we to perform? The trenchancy with which this distinction was stated, and the cool criticism of accepted formulas, made *Principia Ethica* the most interesting of modern ethical works. We may disagree with Mr. Moore about the absoluteness of intrinsic value, and yet entirely agree with him that the problem of goods or values is the paramount question, and that it should be separated for consideration by itself. The only doubt is whether Mr. Moore carried the separation far enough. He provided material for establishing a science of values, but he did not draw the further conclusion which might be drawn. This

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is that the science of ethics and the science of values are two different things.

Values, as we have seen already, cover much the wider field. Of all the things we regard as supremely worth having, by far the greater number are not in themselves ethical or 'moral' at all. They only enter the region of ethics when we consider how far, in given circumstances, we have the right to enjoy them. The society of people we are fond of is one of these most desirable things, and so is the enjoyment of beauty, or the pursuit of knowledge. If we want to make life more worth living for ourselves or others, these are the kind of goods at which we should aim. The moral question is how to secure them in the right way for ourselves and for other people. How much time we can spend in personal intercourse; how, in doing so, we can best set free the capacities of our friends and ourselves; how completely we should devote ourselves to art or knowledge, are the moral problems which arise in connection with these goods. We may find that we have to sacrifice the pursuit of all of them in order to perform duties to other people or to a cause. And merely to carry on



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our everyday life, we have to cultivate the duties of courage, temperance, and honesty. These qualities are useful, in the first place, as means to better things. They are dispositions which we encourage because they set us free. But in the process we find that the type of character and frame of mind which deals victoriously with trials and difficulties is itself a thing of the highest value ; and so this kind of value—moral value—takes its place among the greatest goods.

As moral value is one species of value in general, and the chief business of moralists is to discover how we can share our satisfactions, a science of values and a science of ethics must always depend on one another. Both are closely bound up with the way in which we live our lives. But if they were more clearly distinguished it might be an advantage to each. The realm of values would be investigated in a more thorough and unbiased way. We should have a clearer view of those good things which we value for themselves and not merely as a means to something else, and we should find that there are some of our highest mental satisfactions which the professional moralists have left completely out of sight.

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Above all, we could examine the relation of different values to different temperaments and characters. It might be made practically clear to people what things are most worth having, and which of those things they can themselves attain. We are distracted at present by ignorance of ourselves and by the confusion of our aims. The last thing we consider in education is its effect on the mind of the child ; and even if the child has been fortunate, any good results are generally stifled afterwards by the pressure of occupation and routine. There is a great chance here for applied psychology, and if used it might transform our lives.

From the moral point of view ethics itself would gain if its scope were defined in this way. Certainly its boundaries would have been drawn closer, and it would become subordinate to the science of values. We should see that it was chiefly concerned with means rather than with ends. But the distinctive quality of moral value would be in much less danger of evaporating or being transformed into something else. Try as we may, we cannot make moral value equivalent to all value. We know that it is one type of it,

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and this type we are anxious not to lose. If we identify moral goodness with the good or with good things in general we probably shall lose it. The result of trying to moralise everything is that the moral sentiments themselves slip through our fingers.

Finally, if we make a separate study of values, we shall understand the laws of their changes better. The 'transvaluation of values' was going on long before Nietzsche dragged it to light and used it as a lever to upset morals. It has been a powerful, often secretly working, fact ever since human society was formed. 'History is the great voting-place for standards of value.' Religions are the mightiest incarnations of these standards ; but every form of polity and every fashion in taste embody them to a larger or smaller extent. One advantage of values, as contrasted with ideals, is that we can fearlessly change them. We need not be ashamed of trying to do so. They are the natural expression of our needs. Ideals, on the other hand, are not only nearer, very often, to our brain than to our hearts, but they are consecrated by an immense respectability. You cannot, unless you are

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Mr. Shaw, criticise them resolutely without being suspected as a person of low moral tone. Whether we think in terms of ideals or values, it is desirable that we should be able to change them smoothly, and forecast the consequences rather better. The forcible destruction of ideals cannot be carried out without a positive loss of value—a death to some cherished hope or inspiration and a lessening of joy and interest in the world. If we grasp the theory of values, we minimise these results, and we see more clearly what to make for. Above all, we should accept cheerfully rather than resignedly the law of life that all values change. What was desired for itself is desired no longer, what was valued as a means is valued as an end, and what was before ignored becomes the object of our caring.

There may be some critics who will think that this conclusion is destructive to value. They will urge that it degrades values into fashions, and that nothing can be really worth having in such a transitory world. The view I have suggested will be charged with ignoring the fact of absolute values. Now 'absolute values' is a phrase capable of several meanings. It may be,

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as Mr. Wells suggests in the letter from which I quoted, merely. 'a bad way' of referring to fixed standards. In this sense we do not really want a criterion of progress or value. Progress itself, as Professor Alexander says, means a fresh value which we are engaged in creating. It springs out of those impulses towards perfection and satisfaction which are the source of all value ; and the only security for these is the faith that values will prevail. This faith, the philosopher of religion will tell us,<sup>1</sup> is essentially the religious feeling ; and realism is not antagonistic to it.

But those who believe in absolute values will probably insist on something more definite than this. They are not themselves thinking of fixed standards, a Chinese conservatism in expression. What they want to preserve are 'the things which cannot be shaken'—things of which a particular type of beauty, some moral excellence, or a discovery in knowledge, are only the partial expressions. These things are truth, beauty and goodness, with any higher type or term—if such is to be found—which unifies them.

<sup>1</sup> Höffding, *Philosophy of Religion*, p. 104.

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What is meant by calling these values absolute is not, as a rule, that they are indefinable, or that they are independent in the sense understood by Mr. Moore, but that, even if we could define them, or show that they are always relative to a consciousness of some kind, they are for ever valid and unaffected by their fortunes in this finite world. They are not the mere creation of *our* consciousness, nor do they die with the death of our organism. They are real with the reality of the whole universe, and perhaps more real than time or space ; for they are parts of an Absolute experience which secures them, and it is on our sense of this security that all our action and thought are based.

It will be clear from what has been said that modern realism, so far as it has declared itself on the point, refuses to draw this cheque on the universe. It does not make the assumption a part of its *philosophy*, whatever it may admit to be a possibility for faith. It will not say with idealism that these values have been the foundations from the beginning ; but it does not exclude the hope that they may be made good in the end. Compared with idealism, realism must

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seem disillusioned and even pessimistic. Idealism sees the large outlines and the harmonies, the victories of logic and the affirmations of beauty ; realism sees also the gaps in the plan, the vast multitude of things indifferent, and the perpetual human fallacy by which the wish is father to the thought. Yet realism is not in essence pessimistic, but the reverse. The pessimist, if he is logical, must deny hope ; his theory springs, as Guyau says, from the 'sentiment de son impuissance,' and even while upholding values he may not believe that they can change the world. The realist, on the other hand, not only thinks they can influence it, but points to the fact that they already do so. Born into a universe which seems largely neutral, and is still for the most part unknown, he sees that man carries with him everywhere his faith in effort, his activity of will, his spiritual interests which transform material things. The characteristic gift of life is that it converts things indifferent into things of value. And if the results are inconclusive, and chequered by perpetual failure, it is none the less true that the desire for perfection never dies. In this sense

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values, as categories of our highest experience, *are* absolute.

But realism is not simply a 'religion of humanity,' like positivism. It does not centre all its speculation on man and on the earth. It protests from the first against the notion that our thought and our creations are the measure of all that can be good or beautiful or true. If all our values seem to be relative to a consciousness, this is no reason why there should not be other conscious beings besides ourselves, and other forms of experience which mirror truth and beauty more perfectly. The central fact in realism is that while it makes value depend on living things, it holds that the things which have value are largely independent of them. Consciousness does not make all things, though it makes them good. So the realistic thinker, like the realistic artist, is not anthropomorphic, but the reverse ; he explores what the universe has in keeping, without assuming that its vast span must be of such a nature or such a size. As a theory of being or existence, realism is a philosophy of self-effacement rather than of self-assertion.



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Perhaps in this way it reaches a level not inferior to that of other philosophies which give a smoother answer to the claims of mind and spirit. 'Greatness of soul,' as Mr. Russell has written, 'is not fostered by those philosophies which assimilate the universe to Man. Knowledge is a form of union of Self and not-Self ; like all union, it is impaired by dominion, and therefore by any attempt to force the universe into conformity with what we find in ourselves.' These words express the temper of science ; it might be no bad thing if philosophy copied it more often. It would impose a waiting attitude on philosophers ; and modern realism, as we have seen, attempts no complete explanation, but is bent on clearing the ground. But tentative and impersonal as it may be in its theory of the universe, realism is not passive as a philosophy of life. It is not indifferent to what happens in the world. Its belief in the transforming power of value makes scepticism ultimately impossible ; for it means that there is no absolute contradiction between the nature of things and their worth. Value, or virtue, is not homeless in the world. For values are born in the universe and

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they can subsist there, changing the very conditions in which they came to be. If the core of religion 'consists in the conviction that no value perishes out of the world,' then realism shares the underlying faith which has animated all religions.

## CHAPTER X

### CONCLUSIONS AND APPLICATIONS

What Realism is not — Romance in Art — Antagonistic Philosophies — The Restrictions of Realism — Realism and Reality — Truth in Realistic Art — The Basis of Experience — The Exceptional Fact — Truth and War — Realism in Politics and Action — 'Real Personality' and Groups.

**R**EALISM, whether as philosophy or art, will seem to many to be wanting in the chief conditions of great art and thinking—the power of a ruling sentiment or idea and the true freedom of creation. It has a fatal opposition to romanticism, and to the idealistic thought which is often a romance in thinking.

Romance casts a spell in art, and we all yield to it from time to time, and for some it is the only thing which is profoundly moving. It is the sense of escape which thrills us. Not an escape, always, from ourselves, but from what limits or fetters us. In romance the self may be unfolded, spread out to dream over, free from the pressure

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of material things. It can turn then to Chopin's music, or in poetry to Lamartine's cadences, or shape itself into bizarre and haunting images like Poe's. In such a mood it

‘may not hope from outward forms to win  
The passion and the life, whose fountains are within.’

But there are moments when the mind tires of its own kingdom, and desires one that is palpable, only more glorious than the world it knows. It feels an impulse towards the rich and strange. So Flaubert, sitting in his study, yearned for the rhythmical tread of camels, pointed Chinese roofs, and a tiger's eyes glittering through the jungle. So Coleridge discovered the ‘sunny pleasure dome with caves of ice’; a symbol of the splendours which we half imagine and half remember from a dream. This romantic beauty of imagined forms sets us free from our surroundings, and has been the secret, or half the secret, of the fascination of the Russian ballet.

Another mood—which some hold to be the very core of the romantic feeling—sets us free even from ourselves. This is the movement towards the vague and the infinite, which Rousseau, and still more Wordsworth, redis-

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covered in unwonted places. It has led the modern man, as long before it led his primitive fathers, on to mountain-tops and among solitary wastes. There, in the 'unfrequented haunts of shepherds and abodes of unearthly calm,' the self can be transcended and forgotten. This vision is akin to what Nietzsche calls the Dionysiac view of things, the source of music and tragedy. Lastly, there is the mood of the great story-tellers. Dreaming, ecstasy, and contemplation, passionate or passionless, are forsaken for the delight of action. In the spirit of that delight, under the spell of adventure, the old sagas were made ; and the spirit descends afresh on those who, like Scott or Dumas or Stevenson, love the story for its own sake, for the unrolling of swift deeds and strange events and the brilliant words which tell them. Sometimes it is the pure revel of adventure, and sometimes it has a great suggestiveness, as when the curtain of *Redgauntlet* rises on the crimson sunset, the wet sands of Solway, and the horsemen with salmon spears galloping to and fro. These romances, we are in the habit of saying, 'take us out of ourselves' ; perhaps they do ; but what

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is more certain is that we escape by means of them from all known surroundings, and slake, vicariously, our thirst for change and action.

Art has other forms of the ruling sentiment even beyond the limits of romanticism. There is, for instance, a type of inspiration which is more defined, and yet is too elusive to be confused with a system. The novels of Thomas Hardy have an undercurrent of this kind. Rich as they are in realistic detail and unflinching in their candour, they do not leave the impression of a thoroughly realistic art. That feeling, curiously enough, is left rather by his poems, with their faithful perpetuation of chance moments. But both novels and poems give a sense of 'something far more deeply interfused.' So far as this 'something' is born of an understanding sympathy with nature, it might certainly be the feat of a higher realism to have placed human things and natural things—for the first time in the novel's history—on an equal plane of interest. But there is more than that. It would be too harsh an emphasis to describe as a philosophy the point of view revealed not only in chance sentences but in the whole

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structure of *The Return of the Native* and *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, given again with a different implication in *Tess* and *Jude*, and repeated almost avowedly in so many of the poems. Yet all this art is quickened by a philosophic impulse ; it is as near to incarnate thinking as a great artist can safely go. It shows a world of people and events fashioned in harmony with a pervading view of things. We do not expect to find in this world a perfect correspondence with the actual. It is rather the embodiment, in Mr. Hardy's words, of 'a series of personal seemings or impressions' ; too deeply tinged with a certain colour to be realistic, or even merely personal, and reaching, by its completeness, a kind of universal truth.

There are parallels to almost all these types of art in the world of thinking, and all of them seem to lie outside the borders of realism. The romantic art which delights to exhibit and contemplate the self finds an analogue in the philosophical theories which centre round the idea of self-realisation. For these theories, while aiming at universal truth, draw everything within the circle of the mind and its thoughts.

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It is the self, and not the things that lie beyond it, which is the real interest ; and the universe is only a duplication of it, since it proves to be a second Self, enlarged and glorified. Certainly these theories are based generally on reason, while personal romance luxuriates, as a rule, in feeling ; but none the less they start from the scarcely veiled presupposition that everything is subordinate to consciousness. In this sense all idealism, if not ' personal,' is human or subjective. Again, the idealist's longing for perfection, or rather his assumption that the universe is implicitly perfect, reminds us of that romantic mood which turns from the ugly or unfinished to build a sunny pleasure dome. Granting the fascination of such a view, and its possible stimulus to effort, we may still feel tempted to exclaim, as the poet does, Beware !

‘Weave a circle round him thrice  
And close your eyes with holy dread.’

The instinct for the vague and mysterious is, or should be, satisfied abundantly in philosophy by the conception of the Absolute. The Whole which is the only Real, and yet is only known



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and manifested through appearances, which combines not only the values of truth and beauty and goodness, but the 'disvalues' of falsehood, ugliness, and evil, with an unexplained balance on behalf of the former, so that the Absolute is its only possible description—this, as I have said already, is a conclusion which realism does not regard as profitable or clear.

Another school of modern thought has appealed to essentially the same instinct as the romance of action. This is pragmatism, with its view of truth as the right way of meeting a situation, its constant assimilation of thought to action, and its emphasis on the adventurous hazards of thinking. As a philosophy of *life* realism is distinctly in sympathy with pragmatism. } Both agree as to the difference which action, here and now in time, may make to the sum of things ; both are theories of experience rather than of completion. But in the matter of truth and knowledge there is a certain antagonism between them. The emphasis which the pragmatist lays on the claims of practical satisfaction leads him to a point where the realist cannot follow him. For pragmatism, like idealism, seems committed

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in the end to the view that knowledge makes reality, only without the safeguards which the modern idealist introduces. This view would take all stability and independence out of the world, and make it the creature of individual thoughts and actions.

Finally, just as there is a form of art which regards life as the embodiment of some one guiding thought or feeling, so it has been a common trait of philosophers to choose one element of the universe and look in it for the meaning of the whole. So Spinoza chose substance, Schopenhauer chose will, while modern theorists who start from physical science interpret everything in terms of activity or force. This point of view realism also repudiates as deceptive in its assumptions and its simplicity. It is too easy and too consistent with the prepossessions of the thinker to be true. Theories of this kind borrow a term which has a definite meaning in its own context, and exalt it to the position of a universal predicate, without seeing that their principle is thus emptied of meaning, though it may go on trading upon its former associations.

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Realism in thought rejects many interesting and enticing explanations of the universe, just as realism in art leaves on one side many fruitful types of creation. Indeed, when we consider the other possible directions which activity may take in thought or art—and we have only considered some of them—realism may appear more remarkable for what it does not do than for what it does. The negative side of realism—the restrictions under which the realist puts himself—seems to be the characteristic element of it, and perhaps the only one which its manifestations in art and thinking have in common. Of course, this is the kind of impression that is naturally made when we are looking at the limits of anything, for, as Spinoza said, ‘all determination is negation.’ Yet it is perfectly true that realism *is* restricted in a sense in which romance or idealism are not. It does debar itself, in one case, from the imaginations, and in the other from the hypotheses, which might be suggested by the free creativeness of the mind. ‘The temper of realism is to deanthropomorphise ; to order man and mind to their proper place among the world of finite

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things ; on the one hand, to divest physical things of the colouring which they have received from the vanity or arrogance of mind ; and on the other to assign them along with minds their due measure of self-existence.' <sup>1</sup> This description, which a philosophic realist gives of the method of realistic thinking, applies quite equally to the realistic form of art.

But as art is one kind of activity and speculative thinking is another, the limitations are also different in the two cases. The sphere of realism in art is limited to the actual, that is to say, to the world of our common experience or to what we recognise as possible there. Though the realistic artist may say, as we have seen, that all subjects are equal and indifferent, these possible subjects only exist for him inside the range of possible experiences through which we may live. And within these he tends to return to the familiar, partly because it is the central core of experience which interests him most, and partly because it is there that he and we are in the best position to recognise what is true. But we have seen that one aspect of life after

<sup>1</sup> Alexander, *The Basis of Realism*, p. 1.

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another asserts its claims for realism, and that the matter rests finally in the artist's hands. Realism lies essentially in the treatment of the actual, and it is for the artist to make the unique experience take its place as a vivid and intelligible part of our ordinary world. His method of doing it, whether highly conscious, as in Flaubert's case, or quite instinctive, is 'by letting speak, himself kept out of view,' the scene or situation or character which has become his subject. In this sense he 'deanthropomorphises' like the philosopher; 'se dépersonnaliser' is the phrase which Faguet actually uses of the artist. He sheds not only the personal bias, but so far as possible all bias which besets the human mind as such.

The philosopher is not limited to the actual in the way the artist is, for his business is not with the particular things which happen in the world, but with the laws or forms or general characteristics which make such things possible. And though he is a discoverer and his work is in a sense creative, he does not deal with his material as the artist does, for his task is to understand rather than to vivify; he appeals to the dis-

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cursive and not the æsthetic reason. But when these reservations have been made, his general attitude is the same as that of the realistic artist. He also feels himself in presence of a world which the mind has not made by its own thinking. The actuality or reality of which art persuades us by making it vivid, he can only demonstrate by showing that it is something independent of ourselves, something which includes us and our reason. There will always be minds and temperaments for which a realism of this kind is by no means 'real'; which prefers the feeling of creativeness to the feeling of a solid framework; and for them the realistic way of approaching ultimate problems seems not only to provide no answer, but to make any answer of an illuminating kind impossible. For besides being pledged, like other thinkers, to avoid personal caprices and distortions, the realist is also bound to hold that the most fashionable and reassuring philosophy, that which interprets the world in terms of mind or spirit or will, is itself a fallacy of human thought—an idolon, as Bacon would have called it. This is his restriction, debarring him from the

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flattering solution, as he is debarred from the opposite conclusion of the 'naturalists,' that nature is simply a machine. Realism thus has an air of being mainly negative. As it has been revived in the form of a theory of knowledge, directed against other theories which are highly affirmative, this is almost inevitable. But this is only the reverse side of the doctrine, and on the other it might be said to appear as the most positive of theories, since it affirms the being or existence of divers orders of things, and investigates their nature and connections. Nor would it be quite fair to charge it with stopping on the threshold, and remaining agnostic upon the final problems of metaphysics, until its argument has been fully worked out.

The answer to the question about reality, for instance, still hangs in the air. Realists have told us what they mean by being and by existence, but they have been less inclined to commit themselves on the subject of reality. Perhaps they regard it, not without reason, as a hallmark of ambiguous meaning, which each theorist stamps on the principle that finds most favour in his eyes. We have seen that the independence

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of things is the chief clue of their theory, but we cannot identify independence with reality. For in that case all the products which depend wholly or partly on consciousness, such as history, ethics, art and 'values' generally, would be pronounced unreal. It would be most consistent with the first inspiration of realism, and with the more concrete form of the theory, to say, as common sense does, that the real is what exists—including in that both individual things and universal forms, so far as the latter are embodied in the existent. Existence, as more full and complex, would be more real than the being which abstract forms and principles are declared to enjoy. On the other hand, to declare simply that the real is the perfect, as it is also popular to do, would be a matter of some difficulty for realism. For realists assert that imperfection and evil exist as persistently as anything else, and that they are not mere appearances, swallowed up and transmuted in an Infinite Whole.

It is characteristic of realistic thought to believe that truth is attainable by mortals, without waiting for the completion of an ideal



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experience. And for realistic art, too, truth has a significance which it does not have for art of other kinds. | It is not that the deliberate statement of truth is the realist's first inspiration. His original interest, if we have guessed it rightly, is a vivid appreciation of the shapes and forms of existence. It is a poetic joy in life. But as soon as the artist's mind becomes ever so little sophisticated, and reflection on error begins, it generates that critical apprehension which Flaubert describes as driving him to scoop and dig into the fact. No doubt, as truth is practically meaningless except among a society of men, the realist only begins to contemplate it expressly when he has become aware of rival ways of regarding and representing life. He then reacts against the sentimentalism, romanticism, idealism, and in general the 'pathetic fallacy,' which infects the views of others. Where ancient realism remained pictorial, modern realism tends to be critical and analytic. But here again there is no finality ; at any moment a new temperament may strike out a new type or throw back to a forgotten one.

Though modern realistic art has been affected

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deeply by science, the truth it aims at is not, as Zola thought it was, scientific truth. It is a truth of impression in which feeling and imagination play the essential part. For this reason truth for the realistic artist can never consist in what many people believe to be its essence—a simple correspondence with facts. He is an observer, but he is not a reporter. He does not copy, but he creates a world which refers us back to our own world and shows it to us more truly. The world he makes must be congruous with ours, but it does not correspond with it bit by bit, as a literal imitation. If it does, the vivid truth of impression is defeated; for art cannot hold us with a stale second-hand replica of what we can have in life at first-hand. It has been noticed how in Stendhal's greatest novel the one fact which seems unreal is the fact which was actually incorporated from 'real life.'

The reason why it seems unreal is because of the incongruous mixture of imitation with creation. But the phrase 'seeming unreal' may suggest a further dilemma for the realist. Does not the adventure of life actually consist in those startling, undreamt-of experiences which

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at the moment of happening seem unreal because they are so unexpected ? These, we say sometimes, give us a glimpse of reality or are the real thing. Yet apparently it is just these that realism is incompetent to deal with, if it always has to refer us back, for emotional verification, to the commonplace routine of life. Say what we will, it is tethered to a stake, and the really exciting things take place outside the circle of its tether.

The realist's reply to this might be that his art is not so tied to the routine of life as the objection supposes. Its truth is tested by our whole reach of experience, not by the trivial part of it ; and it is only for the commonplace mind or the stunted life that the whole of experience is trivial. The belief in fantastic, exceptional occurrences, which Dostoevsky among others cherished, is elusive, because it is characteristic of these occurrences to seem unreal, and yet, we are told, they reveal a deeper reality to us. This is the ambiguity about the ' real ' again. It would be truer to say that the strange experience seems impossible, but that it drives us to think of what is most important—

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namely, what it means to live and die. Whether it actually makes us do this will depend on how it is handled. It brings, at any rate, a sudden compulsion to revise our conclusions ; it is the point where we have to make a join in our experience between the new and old. And for this reason, if it is an opportunity for the realist, it is a difficult one. All art is an affair of seeming, and his art deals in what seems true of life. It is because the rare event has not been assimilated to the rest of our experience that it makes, æsthetically, a larger demand on him.

It goes without saying that one of the greatest of these rifts in experience which has ever confronted art and life is presented by the war. So long as armies were professional and their numbers were counted by thousands, the rest of the world might affect a vague callousness to their experiences. Now that they are counted by millions and comprise the manhood of whole peoples, this has become impossible. There arises a burning desire to comprehend, but at that very moment we find something which bars comprehension. There are two worlds of experience, and they seem hopelessly divided.

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The following fragment of a letter quoted in a weekly paper expresses this sense of cleavage, rather temperately than otherwise :—

‘ I have often heard it said that the curious thing about those who have been to the front is their complete indifference. They appear to be practically untouched by what they have seen and gone through, they talk of war in a callous and humorous way, they even joke about its horrors. The impression one has from them is that it is, on the whole, a dreary and unpleasant business, with its anxious moments and its bright moments, but not nearly such a hell as one really knows it to be. In the case of the vast majority, however, this is an attitude, a screen—I speak of educated, thinking men—and it is not granted to many who have not shared the same experiences to see behind this screen. The reason for this, as the article [the article was called “ On Leave ”] points out, is the practical impossibility of the uninitiated to realise or imagine even dimly the actual conditions of war. And a man who has been through it and seen and taken part in the unspeakable tragedies that are the ordinary routine, feels

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that he has something, possesses something, which others can never possess. It is morally impossible for him to talk seriously of these things to people who cannot even approach comprehension. It is hideously exasperating to hear people talking the glib commonplaces about the war and distributing cheap sympathy to its victims.' <sup>1</sup>

It is impossible to read a testimony of this kind without asking oneself more than one question about experience and truth. For here is an exceptional experience which persists in its exception, to the point of not assimilating itself in any way to the experience of those who have not shared it, nor even, perhaps, to the rest of the experience of those who have. It seems to defy expression by any method that we can call representative. For if the artist has not been within the horror his work must be untrue ; and if he has, how can he make the world outside feel or believe his experiences ? The art, therefore, that expresses the war may not be a realistic one. Or if the war is expressed by realism, it will be a realism concerned with states of mind

<sup>1</sup> *The Nation*, 23rd June 1917, p. 299.

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rather than sequences of action. *The Dark Forest* of Mr. Walpole occurs to the mind as a work of great beauty, which uses realistic detail in a certain measure and is evidently prompted by a personal experience, and yet is not realistic as a whole, since its main interest lies not so much in representation as in the working out of an idea. The only type of 'war novel' which can appeal directly or realistically to the experience of the civilian public is that which represents the war at home or behind the front, and one or two successes show that in this form the war is already amenable to art.<sup>1</sup>

There is obviously a social or ethical motive which, apart from the æsthetic one, makes it desirable that truth should be told, whether this is done realistically or otherwise. No virtue suffers more severely in war than truth. The story goes that a Russian statesman, since distinguished as one of the most sagacious heads in the Revolution, told a parliamentary colleague in one of the darker moments before that change

<sup>1</sup> Since this was written there has been a rush of books attempting to reproduce the sensations of war; but only Mr. Siegfried Sassoon's poems seem to bridge the gulf between the two experiences.

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that he was going down to the Duma to tell the truth. 'What? truth in war-time?' was the horrified reply. It was the one thing which was evidently out of place. Truth does not suffer only from the official suppression of disagreeable facts. It is sapped by the idealised or conventional descriptions of those engaged in 'writing up' the war, and by the obsession of mind which makes it almost impossible for any nation to realise other points of view than its own. Detachment may be impracticable while history is in the making, but there is a degree of coolness and comprehension which is needed for judging how to act. There is a realism of the understanding which tries to put the facts in their places and see them as they are.

It may be worth while to emphasise this, because there is a strong tendency to use realism as a mere term of prejudice in politics, just as it has been used disparagingly in the criticism of art. The abuse of the word has come from a mixture of two judgments, one of which is a true conviction and the other an error of thought. It is from German *Realpolitik* that we tend to derive political realism, and in our discussions



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it is generally the Germans who figure as the 'realists.' There are two characteristics which in this way we ascribe to realism ; one is the habit of building on facts and refusing to be taken in by appearances, and the other is the determination to pursue material interests only and to get your own way. We rightly condemn the second, but there is no reason why we should suppose it to be an ingredient in the first. It is clear that the two things have no necessary connection with each other. They may have been united in the Germans—with a large alloy of fixed ideas and false calculations—but it does not follow that they must be found together in every one else. Realism is not materialism in politics, any more than it is materialism in philosophy or Zolaesque naturalism in art. No doubt, as used of politics, the word is a metaphor, and one so often misleading that it might be better discarded ; but if it is used at all, it must be used consistently with its original meaning.

Only so could we hope to describe its relation to political idealism. To one kind of idealism, the false or deluded or subjective, it is certainly opposed. What, then, of the 'sentimental

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idealist' ? It is sometimes forgotten that feelings are facts, no less than material objects or institutions. They are indeed, as has been explained already, the most important of all facts in the region of values—the region where we make those choices which alter the face of our world. 'Sentimental idealist' is a phrase generally applied by those who think in terms of power or tradition to those who think in terms of feeling or ideas ; but for the realist it could only mean one whose wishes have blinded him to circumstance, who thinks that what he desires is already actual, or that it is possible under conditions which, as a fact, forbid it. It seems natural to say that the realist is a person who is mainly influenced by what exists, and the idealist one who is governed by the thought of what may exist. This is true, in a sense, but it does not mean that the realist is satisfied by things as they are. It is rather idealism which, as Professor Perry says, is the 'all-saving philosophy,' while realism is a 'philosophy of extermination.' Between the realist and the practical idealist there is no quarrel. The conflict of realism is with that theoretic or optimistic

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idealism which declines to see the imperfection of things, or uses it, like Browning, as actually evidence for perfection ; which props what is tottering or obsolete because of a latent good which may possibly counterbalance its patent evil. Acting on one temperament realism may make a sceptic or a *désenchanté* ; acting on another it will make a ruthless revolutionary. The 'existing things' to which the realist pays attention are not only the material conditions which limit action, but the felt wants and hopes which inspire it ; and his war is not only with reluctant matter but with codes, formulas, and doctrines which prescribe what one ought to think and feel. The test will be, as it has always been, what satisfies ; and the realist, as a believer in the school of experience, is confident that ideals and values will grow richer rather than poorer. He distrusts only dictated values, fixed standards, and the assumption that all is for the best.

It is perhaps on lines like these that a practical realism might be expected to develop. It should not be confused with that revival of abstract, medieval realism which would attribute a 'real

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personality' to groups or associations, such as churches, trade unions, or other organised societies. As a legal formula—and it is the legal side of the question which is apt to be the pressing one—this has its special application, on which lawyers must be left to pronounce. As a political or metaphysical theory it seems to exaggerate the recognition of an undoubted fact.<sup>1</sup> This fact is the existence of other groups besides the State, which divide with the State the interests and perhaps even the allegiance of their members. They may range from the family to the Amalgamated Society of Engineers, and include all those associations which, whether shadowy or definite, transcend the borders of the State, such as the 'International' and the Roman Catholic Church. The importance of these groupings is not to be denied. We are finding more and more that the chief problem of political theory is not, as it used to be, the relation of one and all, the individual and the State, but the adjustment of one group and one

<sup>1</sup> A brilliant article by Mr. Ernest Barker on 'The Discredited State,' in the *Political Quarterly* for February 1915, discusses the topic comprehensively.

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range of interests to others. Even now, when a colossal war seems to have restored to the State an omnipotence which it had lost for centuries, we are busily devising schemes to limit that sovereignty, as between State and State, more definitely than it has ever been limited before. The establishment of a league of nations, in however loose a form, would recognise that States themselves are groups or constituents of a larger commonwealth, and that their authority is not plenary or uncontrolled.

But this is a different thing from saying that there is a 'real personality' in all these groups. This doctrine, originated to defend the lesser groups against the greater, may be easily turned against the weak. If a Church has the will and consciousness of a real person, the State should have it too. It is the ground of our complaint against Prussia that she has menaced Europe by assuming a personality of this kind, and reducing human souls to insignificance beside the all-transcending State. The 'abstract universal' of the Middle Ages has taken possession of a people and clothed itself with new and terrible force. And what we have learned to our cost

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in this case is always a delusion and a snare. If the group is treated as a real person, the individuals who compose it cease to have the rights of persons, and the uniting principle gets a fictitious strength. We begin to fight for personified interests, crystallised ideas—exactly the things which, as explained above, the realist would analyse remorselessly. The best chance of securing the flexible adjustment of competing interests is to recollect that in every case of a group we are dealing with individuals whom some organising principle has united. In those individuals the will and personality remain. The tie which unites them, whether it is race or interest or simply an idea, may have a passionately compelling effect, but so long as no existence is ascribed to it apart from the members whom it unites, reason has a weapon to temper its exclusive dominion. For the individuals of the group are also susceptible to other ‘universals,’ other principles of combination, and in the name of these we may appeal to them to recognise the common right of all.

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